

THE MINISTRY OF THE CHURCH TO UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANTS:  
A CASE STUDY OF THE BRAZILIAN COMMUNITY  
IN THE GREATER BOSTON AREA

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis seeks to study the ministry of the church to undocumented immigrants in the USA in the context of the Brazilian community in the Greater Boston area. Various issues involved in the topic of immigration are considered in order to provide the reader with a substantive amount of needed variables, which contribute to the formation of the complexity that is characteristic of this theme, with the goal of taking a better informed position.

Using Dr. Eldin Villafaña's "Hermeneutical Circle," this document starts with a clarification of the problem, mining information from observations, experience and written materials. It progresses to a conceptualization of the issue, presented by a literature review, a Theology of Urban Ministry applied to immigration, and the proposal of a strategy for church implementation. The Theology of Urban Ministry applied to immigration is composed of three elements: a Theology of Presence, Theology of Place, and a Theology of Prayer. Following this exposition, a paradigm shift is offered, incongruencies in the practice of Christianity are challenged and the ministry of the church to undocumented immigrants is defined. The next step is unveiled on the last part: a confrontation, in which the outcomes are revisited and the remaining co-related topics are mentioned, indicating the need for more studies for the benefit of the Church as it serves and follows Christ.

In an urban setting the living church is composed of living persons. It is important for the church leader and member to understand biblical and ethically what the response of the Church to illegal immigration must be, and to act based on that comprehension.



**PART I**  
**CLARIFICATION**

## Chapter 1

### Immigration: Everyone is Involved

I first visited the USA in 1990, for a month's vacation. Later, I returned to Massachusetts in 1992 with the desire and opportunity to experience life overseas for one half year and return to Brazil to resume "normal" life. I was initially surprised and intrigued by what I found about the Brazilian immigrant community in the Greater Boston area. I had heard about the "illegals" but I had no idea that my life would be changed because of them. As it turned out, I never experienced living in illegality myself. Every stay and visa I received has been granted consecutively and I never stayed in the country without authorization, not even one day. However, many of my good friends, in ministry and not in ministry, have had different experiences with their "papers," as immigrants often refer to immigration documents.

It is common knowledge among the Brazilians in the USA that the majority of our community consists of undocumented people. It is also understood by all that even among those who currently have their permanent residency cards (*green card*), and subsequent citizenship, many most likely went through a period of illegality. Some, it is well known, even acquired their green cards by using less than legitimate documentation.

Illegal immigration touches my ministerial experience and an ever growing number of ministers are recognizing the need to articulate a biblical response to it, as we deal with the daily tasks of ministry, including administering the sacraments. It was during the final minutes before the official start of a Sunday Communion service that my

many years of contact with the undocumented community as a minister was put to the test when a sincere church member asking me for a private conversation questioned if I believed that he could take part of Communion that evening. In need of more information I asked him what was the reason for his reluctance. His answer split my heart in two. He said he was in the country illegally and thus he could be considered a sinner for that transgression, and he did not know how this affected his own relationship with God. As we talked and I prayed in my spirit asking God what His answer would be for that man, the brother examined his own heart and participated of Communion, reaffirming his commitment to a personal relationship with God, celebrating Jesus' sacrifice for him at the cross and rejoicing in His resurrection and in the fact that he was part of the family of God. The impact of this simple occurrence still holds today. As I interact with other ministers of different backgrounds and denominations I see the split in opinions of how the church should minister to so called "illegal" immigrants.

Given that immigration continues to rise in the USA and that the perceived impact of illegal immigration is in the news, in the mouth of politicians and voters, taxpayers and employers, the issue does not exist boxed up within the immigrant community but it permeates American society as a whole. While most evangelical Christians are united in their opposition to legalized abortion, same-sex marriage and gambling, there is clearly a wall of division between whites (Euro-Americans), African-Americans and other ethnic groups on the issue of ministry to illegals and immigration reform.<sup>1</sup> Whenever I read and hear about ministry to immigrants a large gap is left open and unmentioned. Yes, most would agree that it is the right thing to do to minister to immigrants who are people like

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<sup>1</sup> J. Lee Grady, "What Would Jesus Do With Illegal Immigrants," <http://www.fireinmybones.com/Columns/051606.html> (accessed September 29, 2006).

us, only different. However, the adjective “illegal” or “undocumented” is never mentioned because by doing so the writers and speakers risk losing half of their audience. I intend to begin addressing the issue and further stir up the need to continue to do so diligently.

As Christians and ministers of the Word, it is our calling to be biblically correct (even at the cost of becoming politically incorrect), theologically sound, doctrinally pure and ethically conformed to the truth. The influence of culture, education, Scripture interpretation, gender, age, place of birth, race, life experiences, and a myriad of other variances, is clear when we study controversial issues such as ministry to illegal immigrants. Understanding this, I give myself license to be who I am in writing this thesis, even as I vow to take an unbiased look at the matter, as if such a thing was in fact achievable. In order to position myself to the reader, and vice-versa, allow me to “label” myself under the categories aforementioned. I write from the perspective of a Brazilian woman, who immigrated to Massachusetts, USA in September of 1992, then at the age of 23. Born into a Pentecostal pastors’<sup>2</sup> family and raised in the city of São Paulo, married, a mother. Readers will react to this as they read through their own experiential glasses. That is acceptable and expected. But for now, I invite the reader to consider the challenge. How is the Church to minister to “illegals?”

From the start of this discussion it is important to switch terms. In my perspective, if we choose to call a person who lives in this country illegally an “illegal” we might as well call a person who lives in a mobile home a “trailer.” The object (trailer) or immigration status (illegal) that someone may be found in should never name them because in so doing we would be objectifying people, we would be dehumanizing them.

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<sup>2</sup> Both my father and mother are ordained ministers since 1969 and 1979, respectively.

People are not illegal, their immigration status might be. Continuing with the parallel, though it may sound absurd, people are not trailers, their living arrangement is in a trailer, or mobile home. The term that more accurately describes the people who live in the USA under illegal immigration status is the word “undocumented.” As it refers to USA documents, from visas to permitted stays, from ID cards to driver’s licenses and Social Security numbers, many immigrants are undocumented. Some retain their country of origin’s passports and IDs, but others have arrived and stayed in the USA through such complicated circumstances that even those documents might not be at their disposal. Just as mobile home dwellers do not have their first choice of housing – they would rather have a different type of house but have no financial means to get it – many undocumented immigrants do not have their first choice of supporting themselves and their families in their own country – they simply lack the means for survival.

The issue addressed by this thesis is both complex and relevant to the urban pastor at a level that might be unnoticed by the unaware leader, yet it is very real. Sitting in the pews of many churches, every Sunday, there are American citizens and citizens of many other countries. Or, putting it another way: the congregation might be composed of a mixture of American-born, naturalized Americans, documented and undocumented immigrants, Christians and non-Christians as well. Some recent immigrants might blend very easily in a white congregation, while others may stand out for their physical appearances. Whether or not the minister, especially in the greater Boston area, recognizes the high possibility of the presence of all these mixture of people in their listening audience and chooses to be sensitive to their internal conflicts could change the level of efficiency of one’s ministry. Alternatively, there may be people from all over the

world within a local church's neighborhood yet the church might not have had any influence in the immigrant communities, with no intention to reach out and be changed, rather preferring to stay as is for the time being.

This thesis was developed following Eldin Villafañe's model of study in Social Ethics, the "Hermeneutical Circle." Composed of three distinct parts, the Hermeneutical Circle starts with clarification of the issue, which I will begin addressing in this chapter, and complete in chapter 2 where the reader will find a literature review on the pertinent issues. The second part is conceptualization, which brings the Scriptures and Theological norms into the discussion of the matter. This will be accomplished in chapter three. The last element of the Circle, found in chapter four, is a confrontation which deals with the social spirituality, the role of the Church and of the Christians, as well as a practical strategy. Chapter five is the conclusion of this work with indications of fields and subjects which require further study and/or those that were not the primary focus of this thesis.

Whether a person or an organization is located in an urban or rural area of this or any other country, immigration involves and affects everyone. From the foods we eat, to the TV channels we watch, and the clothes we wear, someone who is an immigrant has been involved in the production or delivery of the good and materials we use in our daily living.

To Americans, more and more neighborhoods are visibly noticing the changes that new people and cultures bring. However, immigration is not something that only brings people from around the world to the United States.

## **Immigrants Are Everywhere**

The theme of immigration reaches far beyond a city, a region or even a nation. It is a global issue. Immigrants are everywhere! Not only in the USA as even some informed people might think, but there are foreigners in every country. I remember how surprised I was when I first sat down and talked at length with a church member in Brazil, as she told me she had immigrated to Brazil from Bolivia and how many hardships she was encountering as she settled in São Paulo. When she described to me how she was underpaid, did not have legal contract of employment, and had no CPF<sup>3</sup> number I innocently asked her why! She was quick to tell me with sadness in her voice that she could not get one because she was there illegally.<sup>4</sup> When I asked why she had come to Brazil, she told me a history of misery and insufficiency (not greed). I sympathized with her, although at that time I could not help her in her plight, since I was little older than a teenager. In my travels, I've met British in Jamaica, Americans in Hong Kong, Brazilians in Mozambique, among others, who by choice or forcefully have settled in a country other than that of their birth. Immigrants are indeed everywhere, and the issues related to their presence affect all of us, whether we care to admit it or not!

## **Resistance in the USA**

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<sup>3</sup> The CPF number (*Cadastro de Pessoas Físicas*) is the Brazilian equivalent to a Social Security number.

<sup>4</sup> Although this reality has changed since 2002, by a Law that allows foreigners in and outside of Brazil to obtain a CPF number, her example still holds true about the challenges an undocumented immigrant faces.

Although the United States has become what it is today because of massive migration movements in the past, many forget or prefer to ignore this part of history. Some might say, “that was then, this is now,” or “I don’t care where my parents or ancestors came from: I am an American,” and things of this sort. It is no surprise to me that God made such a strong point in ordering the Israelites to tell their children where they came from, and what happened to them (Lv 23:42-43 is one among many other passages that register God’s commands in this regard). God established very strong symbolic reminders that taught that nation that at one time they used to be slaves, that God had delivered them from oppression, that God had made a covenant with them. We would not have become what we are today if our ancestors did not do whatever it was they did. Personally I simply cannot say I am Brazilian only, or pure Brazilian. When my great-grandparents decided to board a ship and move from Italy to Brazil they were bringing Italy to my blood.<sup>5</sup> When my grandmother, born of Italians in Brazil had children with my grandfather that had Brazilian Native American and Portuguese blood in him, my mother was born not a “pure” Italian, but immigrants’ blood was there. When my son was born, he carried the history of Italy, Portugal, Brazilian Native Indians, Spain (from my father’s side), Dutch, French, Swiss, German, (from my husband’s family). He cannot dare to say he is *purely American*. We simply cannot ignore history and try to live today as though yesterday didn’t happen. The only exception to my last statement would be if we are talking about forgiveness of sin. In this situation, because of the history of repentance, confession and forgiveness we can walk in the assurance that what God forgave He does not hold against us. But the problem comes when there is unconfessed

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<sup>5</sup> Incidentally, my great-grandmother’s siblings immigrated to the USA in the same period. The family name was preserved because they were men. I have found and contacted people from my roots, as close as three generations back, who are now considered all-American!



sin in history for generations and all of a sudden people just want to move on without recognizing wrongdoing, without repentance, confession, restoration and reconciliation. American immigration laws have been partial and a servant to the white majority for years. Through my interactions with Euro-Americans throughout the years since I immigrated to the USA in 1994, and more recently at a heated panel I moderated,<sup>6</sup> and of course, the contribution of the media and books and exchanges that I hear shouted at on the streets, I have been able to ascertain and categorize a few words that describe the general disposition of the American public towards immigration, both legal and illegal.

### Fear

Recently I interacted with a Euro-American pastor, who described himself as the son of missionaries to a country in South America, who sadly enough expressed this exact feeling of fear. He said,

... we are afraid, and I mean literally afraid that America will be balkanized and destroyed as a country, primarily by Hispanic immigrants ... They want to take over our country ... they've set up a dichotomy with us which is fighting words for us who have been here a long time. You aren't gonna take our land away from us. You know, we aren't going to let you do that.<sup>7</sup>

He pointed out the fact that, in his view I might add, they do not want to learn English, and they want to hang their flags. Fear produces rejection and a defensive spirit.

In the words of former presidential candidate Pat Buchanan,

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<sup>6</sup> I was called last minute to moderate the discussion panel "Immigration and the Church" at Vision New England's Congress 2007, held on February 1-3, 2007, in Boston, MA. The scheduled facilitator was my father, Rev. Cairo Marques, who came down overnight with a virus that made it impossible for him to stand before a crowd. "Discussion Panel: Immigration and the Church: Rev. Josimar Salum, Victoria Fahlberg, Dr. S. Steven Kang, Patricia Solbavaro, Atty Zoila Gomez, Rev. Cairo Marques." (Discussion Panel held at Congress 2007, Boston, MA, February 2, 2007. Recorded by Fleetwood OnSite Conference Recording [www.fleetwood.com/onsite/congress](http://www.fleetwood.com/onsite/congress)).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., CD 1 of 2, Track 5.

...it seems to me, in my understanding of Christian doctrine, the first obligation of the father is to defend his family and the home, and protect it against invaders ... and the fact that invaders might be poor does not justify bringing them into the house and claim the rights of the first born.<sup>8</sup>

This one-sided protectionist view does not take into consideration that those who come might be the fathers he is referring to, protecting the survival of their own and looking for provision for their families. It also ignores the fact that in all likelihood the speaker's ancestors escaped their country of origin in order to provide for their families. In his perspective, though, if the world dies of starvation so that Americans can keep their own social status and power, let it be! Moreover, Buchanan's comments are directed towards legal and illegal immigration, which means that he considers even the immigrants to enter the country by sponsorship of high tech companies and Universities to contribute to Science and Academic progress in the USA to be invaders. By singling out the poor, he makes his case even closer to classism and racism than ever.

The Bible's response to fear is found in 1 Jn 4:18: "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and he who fears is not perfected in love." Fear has to do with punishment? The undocumented immigrants for sure have to live with fear of deportation, but Americans as well? Why? Why is there fear from the American people regarding the increasing numbers of immigrants in the country? God is not unjust to punish the innocent, but if fear has to do with punishment, we would better look at what is causing this fear in our hearts.

## Alienation

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<sup>8</sup> The Interfaith Alliance, "The Role of Religion in the Immigration Debate," <http://www.interfaithalliance.org/site/apps/nl/content2.asp?c=8dJIIWMCE&b=137971&ct=2994261> (accessed February 08, 2007).

Separatism is another word to describe this. The actions will speak much louder than any words on this symptom. Repeatedly city neighborhoods get re-shaped by this simple process: recently arrived immigrants move into the neighborhood, the status quo is shaken, things are not the same as before, the sounds and smells of different cultures come in, and the Euro-Americans move OUT! It is a displacement by choice, simply because people do not want to mix with other people from different cultures or class.

### Despise / Hatred

Again, just to use a very recent example, last month a person nicknamed “Skunk” decided to demonstrate on Cable Access channel how he felt about Brazilian immigrants in the city of Marlborough, Massachusetts. Here is how the Boston Herald Newspaper summarized the news: “In the latest edition of Pro Wrestling Monthly, [Antal] appears on a sidewalk in front of an utility pole that is wrapped in a Brazilian flag. After a tirade against immigrants “who sit around on their lazy butts, collecting,” he rips down the flag, throws it on the ground and appears to urinate on it.”<sup>9</sup> When interviewed by the TV media, his answer was: I am just saying what everybody else feels and just don’t have the guts to do. On the Marlboro Forum blog, Skunk tries to defend himself initiating a thread he titles “I’m not a racist!” in which he states “I have not broken a law in anyway

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<sup>9</sup> Galen Moore, “Brazilian group raises a stink over Marlboro’s ‘Skunk.’”, BostonHerald.com January 20, 2007, <http://pqasb.pqarchiver.com/bostonherald/access/1197926291.html?dids=1197926291:1197926291&FMT=ABS&FMTS=ABS:FT&date=Jan+20%2C+2007&author=GALEN+MOORE&pub=Boston+Herald&edition=&startpage=12&desc=Brazilian+group+raises+a+stink+over+Marlboro%27s+%60Skunk%27> (accessed Feb 07, 2007).

whatsoever.”<sup>10</sup> Later, as the story developed, his demonstration was aired in Brazil by the largest TV station there, on prime time, reaching 35 million viewers. Tired of being attacked, questioned and reprimanded, “Skunk” (Christopher Antal) apologizes to the Brazilian community and retires from his TV wrestling show.<sup>11</sup> This seems to be a sub-product of fear, since, in the words of the pastoral statement by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Migration, some

... are convinced that those who are different are also somehow inferior: less educated, “dirty,” or dangerous. Negative images and derogatory jokes and remarks readily merge with racism, America's “original sin,” reinforcing the fear of the unknown in many people's minds by creating stereotypes about people whose facial features or skin color identify them as Asian, Arab, African, or Mexican. In some instances, racism has been so deeply ingrained that an institutional racism prevails. Racist attitudes can linger in subtle ways, even when people get to know one another in parish activities, unless we vigorously educate ourselves about our neighbors, learn to appreciate their heritages, encounter their own images of us, and strive to work with them on behalf of common causes.<sup>12</sup>

### Dehumanization

This is clearly seen in the choice of language to describe the situation. The very use of the word “illegals” dehumanizes undocumented immigrants. Illegal is their visa status, not themselves. By lowering the people we are talking about to a lower or undesirable class, language assists in maintaining the interlocutors at bay, not emotionally involved and not liable to be put in a position that might require them to reconsider their opinions. This language also offers a more powerful position to those

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<sup>10</sup> The Skunk [pseud], comment on The Marlborough Forum Blog, comment posted on February 1, 2007, <http://marlboroughforum.com/>, (accessed Feb 07, 2007).

<sup>11</sup> Timothy Homan, “Skunk’ issues apology to Brazilians, retires from Marlborough TV, wrestling” The Metro West Daily News <http://www.metrowestdailynews.com/homepage/8998956417712914430> (accessed February 7, 2007).

<sup>12</sup> United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. “Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: Unity in Diversity,” issued by NCCB/USCC, November 15, 2000, <http://www.usccb.org/mrs/unity.shtml#church> (accessed February 08, 2007).

who use it, provoking feelings of “I’m so much better than you because I am legal (or, because I am a citizen by birth).” This is noticeable the case among Brazilians who have been in the USA longer and been able to obtain their permanent residency. At my workplace<sup>13</sup> I have heard many comments by green card bearer Brazilians who try to place themselves higher than their fellow Brazilian citizens still undocumented which indicate their disgust with so many “illegals.” The sad side of this is that the ones speaking were most likely undocumented for years (exceptions allowed), before getting their permanent resident status!

Among Euro-Americans, the power of language can be illustrated by looking at a report about a 2006 fundraising gathering for the Texas Minutemen, a border patrol activist group, during which a vendor from a manufacturer of high-tech night-vision products started his demonstration in the following terms: “Say you’re out shooting pigs at night.”<sup>14</sup> The language that gives human beings animal labels has been notoriously common among racists and is often associated with the justification of genocide. A remarkable example of this can be found in the recent history of Rwanda’s genocides in 1994. Part of the preparation for the killings was the dehumanizing messages that the Hutus spread about their targets, which they labeled “the enemy” and “cockroaches.”<sup>15</sup> In an article Rummel gives Gregory H. Stanton’s causes and conditions for genocide to evolve. Stage 3 is dehumanization<sup>16</sup> in which

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<sup>13</sup> I have worked in the Consulate General of Brazil in Boston since June of 2001.

<sup>14</sup> Alexander Zaitchik, “Texas Hold ‘Em” in *Intelligence Report*, Winter 2006.

<sup>15</sup> Human Rights Watch, *Leave None to Tell the Story: Genocide in Rwanda* (Human Rights Watch, March 1999) under “Propaganda and Practice.” [http://www.hrw.org/reports/1999/rwanda/Geno1-3-10.htm#P458\\_189621](http://www.hrw.org/reports/1999/rwanda/Geno1-3-10.htm#P458_189621), (accessed February 13, 2007).

<sup>16</sup> The 8 stages of the development process for genocide, according to Stanton, are: classification, symbolization, dehumanization, organization, polarization, preparation, genocide and denial (by the perpetrator’s).

Members of the out-groups are dehumanized, as in calling them apes, monkeys, cockroaches, parasites, rats, vermin, and the like. In this way, members of the out-group are made to appear clearly outside of “our” moral universe. As vermin and such, members of the out-group have been stripped of the moral in-group protection against extermination.<sup>17</sup>

To a certain extent, this is seen in current events when the way the media presents the news seems to communicate that only the death of American troops in Iraq or other war fronts reflect real human life lost in battle. This is also the case with the development of the argument in favor of abortion: “you are disposing of body tissue, not a person.”

### Ignorance / Lack of Education

As it is with many other issues in relationships, ignorance gives way to all kinds of misunderstanding and unjust judgment. Immigration issues have become common part of the news and the media, especially citizens’ reactions to a specific event in the life of the community, and most often than not, with negative connotations. Pastors, leaders and community members that are not recently arrived immigrants seem to have “no idea” why it is that we have a problem with immigration in the USA. The past is ignored, the present situation is seen as a local problem (disconnected from the world) and we do not want to bother to deal with it, learn about it, analyze and look for solutions until we reach a point of crisis, or as Rumbaut and Portes said “social problems in America are seldom addressed until they have matured into full-blown pathologies.”<sup>18</sup> It is my opinion that

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<sup>17</sup> R. J. Rummel, “Genocide,” forthcoming in the *Enciclopedia Italiana*.  
<http://www.hawaii.edu/powerkills/GENOCIDE.ENCY.HTM>, (accessed February 13, 2007).

<sup>18</sup> Alejandro Portes and Rubén G. Rumbaut, “Conclusion – The Forging of a New America: Lessons for Theory and Policy”, in *Ethnicities: Children of Immigrants in America*, ed. Rubén G. Rumbaut and Alejandro Portes (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2001), 314-315.

the lack of education is not based on absence of information, but rather, in lack of interest and a fear to discover that the one that needs to change is me, instead of them.

### Walking Away from Christian-Principles-Based Government

We are taught that the USA was founded on Christian principles of freedom, honor, love, compassion and faith in God (in God we trust) but since my arrival in the country 14.5 years ago I have seen this nation be transformed before my own eyes! Christians now have to fight to be allowed to pray in schools, to keep the “in God we trust” inscription on the dollar bill, to hang a plaque of the Ten Commandments in a public building... What used to be sin and illegal is now sin and legal, but the sinfulness of it is no longer weighed in the decision-making process. People are assuming that if it is legal, then it is not sin. Bring up the issues of abortion and gay marriage which are both legal in Massachusetts, and you have sin proclaimed legal and now institutionalized. Consider the issue of immigration and what is illegal becomes sin. Christians need to pray like king Solomon in 1 Kgs 3:9 “Give thy servant therefore an understanding mind to govern thy people, that I may discern between good and evil; for who is able to govern this thy great people?” Discernment between good and evil, right and wrong is crucial in dealing with ethical and theological issues such as illegal immigration. God desires this discernment of his people, according to Isaiah 5:20 “Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!”

## **Passivity of the Church**

For the sake of clarity, I will separate my comments about the Ethnic (Immigrant) church from the Non-Immigrant, dominant culture church.

### **Immigrant Church**

Currently, the ethnic churches live with the knowledge of and the reality of illegal immigration within their communities of faith. In an effort not to hide the reach of the problem, I must register here that many pastors are undocumented immigrants as well. It is wide-spread, it is inevitable, and it is well-known. The greater good of preaching the Gospel, bringing lives to a salvation knowledge, being used by God in healings and deliverances, and becoming a safe community far surpasses the ill feeling of being in the USA illegally. Although pastors, leaders and members know about this irregular situation among their community members, sometimes illegality becomes a “cloud” over the environment, but most times, people accept it as a trying temporary situation and hope for a change which would bring legality to their reach. Prayers are said in favor of those in need of legalization, and faith is exercised, while caution is recommended to stay away from trouble as much as possible. The people that are documented (green card holders or naturalized citizens) help out in any way they can those who are not documented, all the while waiting for a possible change in their loved ones’ circumstances.

However, very often they cannot articulate (i.e. put into words, explain) a theological defense for their actions. They act based on relationship and on compassion



that easily comes by being an integral part of the community and many times by having someone in their own family that has gone through or is in this situation. This camaraderie always makes me think about how personal experiences quickly change our judgmental mindset. Who hasn't ever heard of a pastor who preached so strongly against and dealt so severely with ladies that got pregnant out of wedlock only to find out years later that his own daughter is going through the same thing? What usually happens then is that the pastor, although not changing his stance against sin and the message of the Bible, does demonstrate a change in the way he talks about the situation, usually more softly and more compassionately. The need is real for a well-thought and articulated Theology of the Immigrant, which I hope to contribute with by the means of this work.

### Non-Immigrant Church

Admitting that the list below is not conclusive, I will attempt to bring out the most common currents of action from the non-recent immigrant churches.

*Adoption of a “don't ask / don't tell” approach to the individual.*

This may work for a while, especially in the early stages of the relationship. However, if this relationship is ever to become deeper, sooner rather than later the undocumented immigrant will feel compelled to tell of his/her legal status. In a routine

conversation such as “how was your week?” in a small group, the immigrant might feel safe enough to say that he/she had tough time with the housing situation (too many people living together, too much noise, conflict with the housemates, etc.). When asked if he/she is thinking about moving out, the answer might be “no.” And the reason, if asked for, will be that most other landlords will not accept his/her family because they lack a Social Security number and/or a credit history. As simple as that, the person that “doesn’t want to know” gets to know the situation, and now again, the need for a Theology of the Immigrant becomes very clear.

At the same time this approach that might look as if it is the epitome of respect of one’s individuality, at a deeper analysis carries within a hidden repulsion towards the subject. The subjective message (and threat) to the immigrant is “I will accept you as long as you keep your legal status undisclosed. BUT as soon as I find out that you are in the country illegally (if this is indeed your situation), I must reject you and change my relationship with you for the sake of .... (fill in the blank).”

On the other hand, the undocumented immigrant might be so untrusting and scarred by his previous relationships with Euro-Americans that he may never feel safe to share about this issue. With limited trust, people can only have limited depth in relationship.

### *Refusal to get involved*

Some churches take a “wait and see” stand and secretly hope that by denying that the need is present, the problem will go away. This proves an immaturity of the local

church (or denomination) given that history compels us to deal with challenges before they become ingrained into the cultural traits.

By ignoring the presence of undocumented immigrants in the community, or avoiding any contact, or even choosing not to reach out to the ethnic community with the gospel, the church is speaking loud and clear, yet without words that it is picking and choosing “who is worth of hearing the gospel.”

### *Involvement with uncertainty*

This is close to the situation of some immigrant churches today. Here, the local church decides to get involved with the undocumented immigrant community, but there is tension about this position. Some members or even the pastor cannot seem to grasp why it is that they have chosen to do so, it just “feels right!” But there are always questions such as “Are we going against our government? Are we breaking the law?” Many times these questions just remain unanswered and the church acts in a similar way as the ethnic church, without an articulated Theology.

### **Scholarship**

Repeatedly scholars arrive to the same conclusion: we know the problems, but we can't come up with a solution. There are proposed solutions, but they all involve much higher authorities to get accomplished, none of them is simple, and none of them is fast. Among the Brazilian immigrating community in New England, Brazilian government authorities and the USA as a whole, one of the biggest unanswered questions is: how

many Brazilians are there in the USA? Nobody knows. The same is true in other immigrant communities. Undocumented immigrants have learned to live “in the shadows.” As an example, some Brazilians that live in the jurisdiction of the Consulate General of Brazil in Boston have had difficulty to prove their residence in the area. They do not own even one piece of document that can prove their address. They are paid in cash at their jobs, they share a house with somebody else (many times a documented immigrant who will sign the lease), they either don’t have a car or use somebody else’s, they don’t have a bank account (they choose to use money orders), they have no contracts whatsoever with any service company in their names (ex. Comcast, Verizon, etc.), and some even buy prepaid cell phones in order to avoid signing a contract. In lieu of a residential address, they rent (somebody else signs the contract) a Post Office box, and they move their housing arrangements constantly, making a mailing list a nightmare to keep updated! Who can tell how many Brazilians are here? No one. Only God knows! And He knows each one by name!

The questions that scholars are asking are pertinent and are a great start to the process. The need must be assessed. However, I suggest that it is time to move on, pick up from the diagnosis stage and move forward towards a solution.

### **Government, Law Makers, and Politics**

I respect the government of the USA. I chose to become a citizen, a voter and I’ve done my jury duty! I must now bring in my contribution to the country that adopted me. I

must use the prophetic voice God has given me as a Christian and as an immigrant. And so I will.

In my perspective, the democratic process has an ailment that Senge calls “unintended consequence.”<sup>19</sup> Although it functions by hearing the voice of the population through elections, each vote has become a prize of such value to the candidates that they will to change their opinions, values and stands, if necessary, to obtain the most votes and guarantee their re/election. By doing so, most politicians (and I include law makers and the government as a whole in this classification) will not choose to go against the will of the people, even if they believe that what the people want is not the best for the country. Nowadays, with the anti-immigrant spirit that prevails in the nation, I suspect most candidates that are really interested in being re/elected will lean towards immigrant-bashing speeches and proposals of toughening laws and even more border patrol. In short, their stands are not unbiased. Even the politicians who “defend” the immigrants do so in precincts where the presence of a large voter representation of immigrants, particularly longer term immigrants, now voting citizens, becomes election-defining.

The concern is real, and I agree with it, for national security, but it seems to me that this has been used more times than not, as a crutch, to cover up the real issues at hand: issues of power, and racism/discrimination.

### **Undocumented Immigrants**

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<sup>19</sup> Peter M. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline* (New York, NY: Currency Doubleday, 1990), 158.

Besides the general adaptation challenges that every immigrant faces, undocumented people have to deal with extra pressure. In the class of “undocumented immigrant” there is a mixture worth exploring. There are the true victims: refugees of war, of persecution, of famine, of economic undergrowth. There are the middle-of-the-road needy ones: people that were somehow making a living in their countries, but that sought more opportunity to reach their human potential. There are the opportunists: people that come on a tourist visa, have a good life in their country, but see that if they overstay their visa just a little bit, they might save just enough dollars (by living in poor conditions here) to reach the next social scale back in their countries. Granted, not every immigrant has the same story. Every immigrant does have something in common: they are human.

In the case of the undocumented immigrants, their condition is one of constant fear (ex. today could be their last day in this country if they get caught and deported; their family might be split overnight with American born children and a legal spouse – or even an American citizen spouse – might choose to stay here if the case be that the undocumented is deported), constant devaluing (ex. the rate per hour is customarily lower for undocumented immigrants than for documented immigrants and citizens), constant moving (ex. because of housing costs, a very fluid immigrant community, and tension in the city/area where they live, undocumented immigrants feel pushed around and move many times during the year). While they wait for a possible amnesty or else an opportunity to become legalized, many of them work (sometimes by getting cash payment, other times, they get checks) and pay their taxes (using an ITIN number)<sup>20</sup> and

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<sup>20</sup> An Individual Tax Identification Number (ITIN) is issued to a person who cannot obtain a Social Security Number (SSN). With this number the individual can (and should) pay income taxes.

although they are contributing to the USA government funds, they benefit nothing from their contribution or very little. Meanwhile, they hear everywhere comments about their “laziness,” “use of public benefits” and “illegal status.” Their tax dollars go in part to funding higher education institutions, yet their undocumented children cannot enroll at state colleges paying the lower in-state tuition because they are not citizens. This in fact, occurs even when the immigrant is documented but does not have a green card!<sup>21</sup> For fear of deportation, some do not go for healthcare in American, or licensed clinics, choosing to go to clandestine doctors and putting their well-being at risk.

In the church, they feel that they need to get together and start their own church community, in order to maintain the language and culture, to worship in their home language and to be able to use their own expression of individuality. It is only in the ethnic church that some of these immigrants will have any opportunity to serve God by publicly serving the church.

### **Brief Historical Background of Brazil**

Since the context of this thesis is the Brazilian community in the greater Boston area it is in good order to provide a sketch of the characteristics of this community and its transformations by immigration to the USA.

Brazil is a country rich in natural resources and it has been spared from many forms of natural disasters. Historically the country received immigrants during the 19<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Jarrett T. Barrios, “The Future of the New Generation of Immigrants,” in *Giving Voice to a Nascent Community: Exploring Brazilian Immigration to the USA through Research and Practice - Working Papers on Latin America no. 04/05*, ed. Clémence Jouët-Pastré, Megwen Loveless, and Leticia Braga (2003): 23.

and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. People came mainly from Portugal, Italy, Germany, Spain, Japan, Poland, and the Middle East, besides other nations immigrated to Brazil attracted by the labor opportunities the country offered.<sup>22</sup> But after many years as a country that received immigrants the reverse process began at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

During the 1980's demographers show the first exodus in Brazilian history. Following President Collor's (1990-1992) economic plan in the beginning of the 90's,<sup>23</sup> the number of Brazilians leaving the country increased greatly. Collor's "stabilization plan" began by confiscating some US\$50 billion in financial and bank assets from depositors and investors, thereby plunging the country into recession.<sup>24</sup> In a similar way to that in which people vividly remember the trauma of the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the USA, Brazilians still recall with much clarity what happened in that year. I was at the end of my first visit to the USA when I got the news that the new Brazilian President had supposedly taken everybody's money from the bank!

Shortly after taking office, Collor launched the "Collor Plan," which attempted to reduce the money supply by forcibly converting large portions of consumer bank accounts into unspendable government bonds, while at the same time increasing the printing of money bills, a contradictory measure to combat inflation. All accounts over 1,200 Cruzeiros were frozen for 18 months. He also proposed freezes in wages and prices, as well as major cuts in government spending. The measures were received unenthusiastically by the people, though many felt that radical measures were necessary to reduce the constant inflation. Within a few months, however, inflation resumed, eventually reaching rates of 25% per month. This strategy, many economists say, was in fact a cover-up for lowering the high public debt bill. The "confiscated" money had negative real interest rates while in the government's hands and this negative difference was indirectly used to significantly lower the Brazilian sovereign debt.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Sylvia Duarte Dantas DeBiaggi, *Changing Gender Roles: Brazilian Immigrant Families in the U.S.*, (New York, NY: LFB Scholarly Publishing LLC, 2002), 7.

<sup>23</sup> President Fernando Collor de Mello's term was shortened by a popular impeachment.

<sup>24</sup> Rex A. Hudson, *Brazil: A Country Study*. Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1997. <http://countrystudies.us/brazil/96.htm>; (accessed March 16, 2007).

<sup>25</sup> Wikipedia, "Fernando Collor de Mello." [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fernando\\_Collor\\_de\\_Mello](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fernando_Collor_de_Mello) (accessed March 16, 2007).



This came without previous warning. What this meant to many Brazilians was that those who had, for example, sold a house and deposited the money in the bank on March 14, 1990, had virtually lost everything, when they woke up the next day. This applied equally to individuals and corporations! The promise was that people would be paid back, in small installments, overtime, but in reality, Brazilian people lost a lot of their own investments, and worse, they lost whatever little trust they still had in their government, and hope for a good future in Brazil was gone for good.

The Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs estimates that 1.900.000 Brazilians live abroad. This number increases at a 20% rate each year. The main hosts of this population are the United States (an estimated 900.000), Paraguay, Japan and Europe.<sup>26</sup>

### **Coming and Living in America**

Brazilians are a people with deep roots in their culture, which they take along anywhere they may live. The predominant mindset among Brazilians in the USA is transitional. Most immigrating individuals and families plan for a short or medium length stay (commonly 6 months to 2 years). The academic community is especially determined as such. Scholars and post-graduate students come mostly for a short period stay, particularly those who come by sponsorship of the Government or private companies. A second category of Brazilian academics in the USA is composed of self-supported students, the majority of whom are in the undergraduate level of studies. They are children of affluent people in Brazil, who had the chance to learn and practice English as

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<sup>26</sup> Lidia Antongiovanni, "Regional Differences," in *Brasil em Foco* CD-ROM <http://www.mre.gov.br/cdbrazil/itamaraty/web/ingles/consnac/ocupa/difreg/index.htm> (accessed September 29, 2006).

a second language before coming to the USA. Their outlook varies from person to person. Some are determined to return to Brazil and make a difference in the country, start up new businesses, run for political positions, etc. Others have their minds set on finding an internship or even a job in the USA, and settle here or another English-speaking country.

Besides the scholars, there is a different category of citizens, enormously larger in numbers, but yet with much influence in the way Americans perceive the presence of Brazilian immigrants. The laborers that arrive here whether trained or untrained, educated or uneducated, documented or undocumented, all bring within them a strong courage to fight for their goals, sometimes even flowing out of survival needs. Interestingly enough, according to DeBiaggi, “roughly half of the immigrant Brazilian population in Boston is from (Governador) Valadares,” a city in the state of Minas Gerais with connections to America going back to the shipping of mica for radio construction during World War II. More recently, there has been an increased presence of Brazilians immigrating from other states, such as Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo and other cities of the West, Central South and South of Brazil.<sup>27</sup>

One of the characteristics of this community is the large number of undocumented individuals. As the world changes in hopes of offering more security and less risk of terrorist attacks, life is getting harder for undocumented immigrants. They do not have a driver’s license, and when they do, most cannot renew it. They do not have a Social

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<sup>27</sup> Maxine L. Margolis, “Na virada do milênio: A emigração brasileira para os Estados Unidos” (In the turn of the century: Brazilian emigration to the United States). In *Fronteiras Cruzadas: Etnicidade, Gênero e Redes Sociais*, (Crossed frontiers: ethnicity, gender and social networks), comp. Ana Cristina Braga Martes and Soraya Fleischer, 51-72. São Paulo: Paz e Terra, 2003, 55.

Security number, many times not even a Brazilian passport.

Through the already existing network of Brazilians in the USA, newly arrived immigrants find both a threat and a help. Some are subject to exploitation and tricks by their own countrymen. Others benefit from an honest helping hand offered by close friends and family. At first, finances are tight for some come owing large amounts of money for travel expenses. But, as people assimilate the culture and learn the language, they find better jobs or open their own businesses and start saving money. This newfound financial prosperity causes a series of changes within the families and the community. One of the changes easily pinpointed is a result of the lack of accountability. Many people come here by themselves, with no close relatives or friends around which gives them a fresh start in life. This is when nominal Christians or simply religious people take the opportunity and get out of church altogether. It is also the time when people have genuine conversion experiences.

The Brazilian community in the USA is a heterogeneous group. Its characteristics vary from state to state, even from concentration to concentration within a state. Usually highly educated Brazilians do not mix or develop relationships with blue collar Brazilians and vice-versa. The majority of Brazilian immigrants are young people, from 18 to 30 years of age (72.2%).<sup>28</sup>

It is common for Brazilian immigrants who have lived here for more than a couple of years, to be able to point out the newly arrived. Besides the dreams they come with, all come with a smile that slowly but surely disappears, more often than not and at least for a while, due to the common difficulties in adaptation. For some, the weather is a

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<sup>28</sup> Zenólia Maria de Almeida, *Fazer a América: inserção e mobilidade do imigrante brasileiro em uma economia de base étnica*, (Coronel Fabriciano, MG: Edições Unileste, 2003), 78.

problem. Those who come to the colder areas of the USA, sometimes migrate to warmer places for health issues or because they get depressed with the “indoor syndrome.” The loneliness is at times almost unbearable for those who come from a highly engaged social life, and missing the relatives and friends is also a major item in the sadness during the first few years here. The loss of identity, loss of social status, and loss of political power are among the worst processes Brazilians deal with when immigrating to the USA.

Church and parachurch organizations become the social activity centers of Brazilian Christians.<sup>29</sup> Recreation is mainly provided by church events such as church-promoted social dinners, cell groups, Christmas gatherings, Easter celebrations, retreats, Summer picnics, etc. Non-Christians obviously have an entirely different social life. The biggest secular cultural event is the “Carnaval” week, equivalent to “Mardi Gras” and held during the same season. Another big gathering is the “7 de setembro” (7<sup>th</sup> of September) celebration of the Brazilian Independence Day. Both of these events occur scattered throughout the country, wherever there is a Brazilian concentration, but they always gather a bigger mass of people in the streets of New York City. Nightclubs keep proliferating, as do soccer teams and beauty pageants, among other forms of entertainment.

### **Demographics in the USA**

Currently, the presence of Brazilians in the United States in numbers is very confusing and the best we can attain are estimates, if we want to go beyond researches that come up with numbers out of reality. “Since the late 80’s, official statistics record a

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<sup>29</sup> Margolis, in *Fronteiras Cruzadas*, agrees with me.

new phenomenon in the Brazilian society: the emigration in big waves of Brazilian citizens to countries abroad. Today there are around 1.5 million Brazilians residing abroad, to whom are added about 3.5 million who travel annually for various reasons to places outside of Brazil.”<sup>30</sup> The “United States Census Bureau” produced 6 tables showing the number of Brazilians in the whole of USA who stated they have “Brazilian ancestry.” This would include besides people born in Brazil, American citizens born to Brazilian parents and those who have one Brazilian parent (first reported). It would also include the grandchildren of Brazilians who mentioned that fact during the Census interview (second reported). The Brazilian ethnicity started to show up only in the most recent Census counts. The year 2000 Census count show the presence of 181,076 Brazilians in the whole USA.<sup>31</sup> Contrasting with both the Census and the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Brazilian community leaders in the greater Boston area estimate the total of 300,000 Brazilian citizens residing in the New England area, Connecticut not included. Of these, at least 150,000 live in Massachusetts, with higher concentration in the Greater Boston area, Framingham, Marlboro and Worcester.

More than half of the Brazilian population has an irregular status in the USA, according to Immigration authorities. Since 1990 Brazil is the second greater country of origin of immigrants in the state of Massachusetts, partly because of the network already in place, and partly also because of the many incentives and social services the Commonwealth makes available to all its residents, regardless of immigration status.

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<sup>30</sup> Ministério das Relações Exteriores, Brazilian Government. “Assistência Consular,” under “Brasileiros no Exterior.” [http://www.mre.gov.br/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=607&Itemid=476](http://www.mre.gov.br/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=607&Itemid=476) (accessed March 27, 2007), my translation.

<sup>31</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. Census 2000, Brazilian Ancestry, United States. [http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/QTTable?\\_bm=y&-geo\\_id=01000US&-qr\\_name=DEC\\_2000\\_SF3\\_U\\_QTP13&-ds\\_name=DEC\\_2000\\_SF3\\_U](http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/QTTable?_bm=y&-geo_id=01000US&-qr_name=DEC_2000_SF3_U_QTP13&-ds_name=DEC_2000_SF3_U) (accessed March 27, 2007).

The Brazilian Government has established Consulates in the areas of larger concentration in the USA: Los Angeles (CA), San Diego (CA), Chicago (IL), Houston (TX), New York (NY), Miami (FL), Boston (MA), and offers consular services at the Embassy's offices in Washington (DC).

## **Conclusion**

This brief overview of the plight of undocumented immigrants to the USA has led to the conclusion that there is a real need for a theology of undocumented immigrants. We have explored some of the general public's reactions to the perceived increasing numbers of immigrants in the country, the importance of language choice when addressing undocumented immigrants, the need for an interest in educating ourselves about migration movements in the world, some positions of the ethnic churches and the Euro-American churches about immigration, and in particular we have highlighted the complexity of Brazilian immigrants' history and reality in the greater Boston area. In the next chapter we will review some literature about a variety of fields that influence and contribute to an informed discussion of the issue of illegal immigration and the church ministry to undocumented immigrants.

## **PART II**

### **CONCEPTUALIZATION**

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

Very few authors directly address the interaction between illegal immigration and church ministry. We can find many works about each issue separately, but the interaction is tense and sparsely written about. I have been approached in the past by pastors with the heart to serve immigrants, but who get scared and ethically confused about serving the community of undocumented immigrants as though they feel like in doing so they would be going against the law. These pastors might look around in search of books and written help, but that is hard to find. Nevertheless, I will review some books composed from the various fields that influence the reflective exercise object of this thesis, especially those which make an attempt to address the interrelation of two or more disciplines of study.

### Brazilian Immigration

#### *Brasileiros nos Estados Unidos (Brazilians in the United States)*<sup>1</sup>

Ana Maria Braga Martes dedicates Chapter 4, entitled “Brazilian immigrants and the churches in Massachusetts”<sup>2</sup> to the role of churches, both catholic and evangelicals, within the context of the Brazilian immigrant community located in Massachusetts.

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<sup>1</sup> Ana Maria Braga Martes, *Brasileiros nos Estados Unidos: Um Estudo Sobre Imigrantes em Massachusetts* (Sao Paulo: Editora Paz e Terra, 2000).

<sup>2</sup> My translation. The title of this chapter in Portuguese, the language in which the book was written, is “Os imigrantes brasileiros e as igrejas em Massachusetts.”



Although she does not declare what religion she follows, if any, the Christian reader recognizes that without a doubt she is not writing from an evangelical Christian perspective. Her insights are helpful to this work, but I was uneasy with the fact that this whole chapter and her conclusions were based on very little observation, and mostly on very few interviews with five catholic clergy (fathers and nuns) and three evangelical pastors. From what I gathered, she might have sat down once with each, asked her questions and left with a recorded tape. Besides the apparent little time spent in interaction with these subjects, I was disappointed that out of a universe of hundreds of pastors, she chose only three, one of them being a highly controversial pastor within the community. To this pastor's comments she dedicated more of her quotations and criticism. While part of the Brazilian community validated his ministry making it the largest, most known and wealthiest one in the area, almost everybody else who was not connected to it had some criticism about it, particularly about some questionable growth techniques the church allegedly used. I am thankful that the author was not so well connected to know the hear-say and publish it. However, it was a little irritating to me to read these reports and to have this one minister taken as the biggest and best example of the Brazilian evangelical community in Massachusetts.

That aside she makes some interesting comments on the issue at hand. According to Martes, "the helpless and afflicted compose one of the targets of the churches, especially of the most recent, namely of the Pentecostal churches."<sup>3</sup> In defense, I would contend that these churches should continue to do so. While she used this as a means to say that churches get the weak people in, as a Christian I say that according to Scriptures we are to reach out to the helpless and lost, the afflicted and oppressed, the orphan and

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<sup>3</sup> Martes, *Brasileiros nos Estados Unidos*, 113.

the widow. What she meant to say as a put down, I take as a compliment for it shows that these churches are obeying God's directives in a noticeable way.

Martes mentions that the number of evangelicals is larger in Massachusetts (22%) than it is in Brazil (13%) and that Pentecostals are "possibly the social segment most representative of the Brazilian immigrants in Massachusetts."<sup>4</sup> Indeed, a Brazilian getting acquainted with another can ask with little risk of being embarrassed where the new found friend goes to church and invite him or her to visit his own church in case they don't have a home church. Talking about church is much easier here even than in Brazil because people see the church's role as more than simply religious or spiritual.<sup>5</sup> It is in the church community that one can find all sorts of help and assistance. From the well-known *living in help*<sup>6</sup>, to jobs, to clothing, to friendships, English lessons and entertainment, a person and the family can find a network of information and formation available in churches, which are considered safe places. Thus, inviting someone to church is likened to inviting them to community. God must be found there somewhere, but many go because of the people, and what they can offer, not because of God.

Of course, pastors and leaders do not forget the spiritual life and calling of the church: that is why we exist, but by the nature of the life of the community they serve, they must not limit their ministry to the spiritual side. Even when it is clearly the intention of the newcomer to get all he can out of this church and leave, many churches

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 115-117.

<sup>5</sup> Martes comments that churches promote "two kinds of service: religious itself, and personal help," *ibid.*, 119.

<sup>6</sup> "Living in help" or "morar de *help*" is an expression that mixes Portuguese and English, created by the Brazilian community in the Greater Boston area, and it means that someone is temporarily with no condition to pay for rent, and someone else, whether a relative, a friend, or someone previously unknown to them, has opened the doors of their home to give them shelter for a period of time, rent free. The period of time varies and is rarely set before the help is offered. This produces many disagreements and disappointments, yet it continues to exist as a remnant of the solidarity that many say is gone among Brazilians in Massachusetts.

still give themselves out to serve these people. As they serve and pray, there is hope that one more life will be brought into the kingdom of God, attracted by God's love expressed by His people's actions.

Martes also expounds on the theology of community as it differs between Catholics and Evangelicals. In her opinion, the Catholic clergy promote the creation of a church community that learns and then works for the transformation of their environment, a theology of engagement with their society. With this in mind, Catholics discuss and explore the issue of being immigrants in Massachusetts. Meanwhile, Evangelicals teach a much more individualistic theology, where everything is personal and individual, forgetting its collective effects. In this situation, Martes writes "rarely the condition of immigrant is approached in a direct way by the pastors during the service celebrations."<sup>7</sup> Again, I can only wish she would have attended more services and in different churches in addition to the three she chose. I concede that when compared to the Catholic bend, Evangelicalism in Brazilian churches is very much individualistic, but pastors do address the issue both from the pulpit and in private – it is inescapable.

*Giving Voice to a Nascent Community:*

*Exploring Brazilian Immigration to the USA through Research and Practice*<sup>8</sup>

This document is presented by the David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies at Harvard University and is composed of written records of roundtable

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 134.

<sup>8</sup> Clémence Jouët-Pastré, Megwen Loveless, and Leticia Braga, "Giving Voice to a Nascent Community: Exploring Brazilian Immigration to the USA through Research and Practice," *Working Papers on Latin America* no. 04/05-2 (2003).

discussions and a collection of papers produced by scholars and leaders of the Brazilian community in New England, during two interdisciplinary events, the “First Brazil Week at Harvard” (April 8-11, 2003) and Roundtable Discussion on Brazilian Immigration (November 8, 2003). The objective of the documents and interactions was not to provide answers but rather to foster more ideas, analyses and increase questioning about Brazilian immigration across diverse intellectual communities.<sup>9</sup> The issues range from work rights, mental health, and abusive relationships to access to higher education. At the overview of Brazilian immigration, most Brazilian immigrants are classified as “economic refugees” who fled Latin America’s “lost decade” (1980s). According to the Brazilian Federal Police’s data gathered in the 1980s, about 1 percent of the total Brazilian population emigrated to countries such as Portugal, Italy, Paraguay, Japan and the mostly the United States, which was the choice of about 38% of these refugees.<sup>10</sup>

The First Brazil Week raised some issues for discussion, which I summarize below.

### *Why do Brazilians Come to USA?*

“Either for economic reasons or to be reunified with family members who have come ahead.”<sup>11</sup> I agree with that. It is my experience that most Brazilians leave Brazil because they need opportunities to support their family (jobs) and/or opportunities to reach their potential (possibility of entrepreneurship, public safety, and alike). Many

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<sup>9</sup> Jouët-Pastré, Loveless, and Braga, “Giving Voice to a Nascent Community,” 6.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>11</sup> Carola Suárez-Orozco, “Brazilian Immigration: Introduction”, in *Giving Voice to a Nascent Community: Exploring Brazilian Immigration to the USA through Research and Practice - Working Papers on Latin America no. 04/05*, ed. Clémence Jouët-Pastré, Megwen Loveless, and Leticia Braga (2003): 18.

others follow their parents or family members afterwards if not for the very same reason of a search for a better life, then for the simple fact that they are family and desire to be together.

### *Who Comes?*

“The immigrants that are coming in are also quite diverse in terms of economic backgrounds, and I would say that that is also true for the Brazilian community. It is not simply, like in other groups, just the high end or the low end; there is really quite a lot of diversity in terms of economic profile ...”<sup>12</sup>

Children and youth come with their parents by no choice of their own and later find themselves suffering the consequences of an illegal entry and/or stay into this country.

### *What is the Influence of Immigrants on Population Growth in Massachusetts?*

“... without immigrants the state would have experienced little or no population growth. Population growth is healthy to the economy and to the business sector and it increases the need and demand for goods and services.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ray DeSilva, “Contributions of the Immigrant Workforce”, *ibid.*, 19.

*What is the influence of immigrants on economical growth in Massachusetts?*

The study titled “The Changing Workforce: Immigrants and a New Economy in Massachusetts,” done by MassInc. in 1999, has

... confirmed that New England is more dependent on our [immigrant] labor force and population more than any other region in the country. The labor force in Massachusetts would have shrunk – by 200,000 jobs – since 1970 without the influx of immigrants. Immigrants accounted for 82% of the net growth in the Massachusetts working force since the mid 1980s ... New England’s prosperity in the past decade has happened not “in spite of immigrants” but in large part because of them.<sup>14</sup>

The myth that tells citizens that immigrants are a burden to the economy is a main problem in the discussion of immigration, and much more, illegal immigration among immigrants and Americans citizens.

*How Can Massachusetts Become More Pro-Immigrant?*

This was addressed by State Senator Jarrett T. Barrios (Democrat), who introduced himself as “the first Latino State Senator in the history of Massachusetts.”<sup>15</sup>

The major issues he mentioned in his 15-minute speech were:

- a) Workplace issues, including healthcare for workers and their families, decent wages, and safety at the workplace;
- b) Impact of housing costs on the host neighborhood, caused by sharing the household costs with multiple families, which increases street parking problems, school crowding, large number of children, etc.;

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>15</sup> Barrios, “The Future of the New Generation of Immigrants”, *ibid.*, 21.

- c) Disparate treatment that undocumented immigrants or their children face when they go to higher education institutions in the Commonwealth because they are not eligible for in-state tuition.
- d) Impossibility to be granted driver's licenses;
- e) Interpreter services are critical in hospitals and courts, among others, to provide minimal conditions for the immigrants to make informed decisions about their health and justice issues;
- f) Bilingual education for newcomers;
- g) Adult basic education for immigrants who arrive later in life and need basic civics and English instruction.<sup>16</sup>

Among the issues brought up at the roundtable discussions in November 2003, the following few inform us in the current considerations.

### *Historical Dynamics of Inter-Ethnic and Inter-Racial Relationship*

Sheila Skitnevsky-Finger raises a most important issue for inter-ethnic and inter-racial relationship: the divide between “us” and “them.” She writes about the cultural pressures on the immigrants, from a historical perspective. Pointing out that this country was founded for and populated by immigrants she also makes clear that nowadays, besides the Native Americans and Annexed Mexicans all others are generations away from their original immigration experience, which causes them to think of themselves as “pure Americans.” She describes the actions of the Puritans in forming a new society, and re-inventing themselves, to be stained with the intention to create a homogeneously white

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 21-25.

society. In fact, “in supporting the Naturalization Act of 1790, Congress affirmed its commitment to the “pure principles of Republicanism” and a determination to develop a citizenry of good and “useful” men. ... The “worthy” also had to be “white.” ... America was to be a better place... for whites!”<sup>17</sup>

Two of the rigid social mechanisms installed then to control society’s members and the destinies of many generations to come still affect new immigrants today – they are: a) projection of attributes; and, b) otherness.

Fear of losing their control and identity motivated the Puritans to use the mechanism of projection: they created cultural myths that portrayed Indians as “wild and savage” and themselves as pure and superior in an attempt to calm down their inner turmoil and also to justify the atrocities committed against the natives by proclaiming that through their acts they were fighting evil.<sup>18</sup> This mechanism historically leads to the next.

Otherness: dichotomy between *us* versus *others*. The author argues that “the ‘hidden’ origins of slavery were rooted in class rather than race.”<sup>19</sup> Most English colonists came to America as servants, with dreams of becoming landowners. When they realized that the higher class of whites they were serving would legislate to protect their own social status, they became discontent and united with the blacks. The dominant landowners learned that they would have more trouble keeping whites as perpetual servants. Until the 1660’s African slaves’ recruitment had been low because the intent was to keep this new society homogeneously white. In order to protect white homogeny, they came up with a way to have the presence of blacks in the country but not have to

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<sup>17</sup> Sheila Skitnevsky-Finger, “Denaturalizing the American Naturalization Process: The Impact of American Immigrant History on the New Immigrant”, *ibid.*, 85.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.



deal with their input in the exercise of citizenship rights: they would deny those rights based on the color of their skin. To this day the generally accepted American identity is one of white European origins, regardless of the fact that one third of the North American population is in fact not European in origin.<sup>20</sup> We now deal with other “color” designations from the part of Americans: Africans are painted as “blacks” for socio-economic reasons; Irish are painted “green” for their religious differences; Asians are painted “yellow” for their cultural differences; and, finally, Latinos are painted “brown.” This racial color-coded divide is established between whites (us) and the ones who have colors (all the others).<sup>21</sup>

Currently, Brazilians are clearly the *others*, as it is demonstrated by the demographic information forms we are subjected to, in which there is no option for us to categorize ourselves but for *other*. We are not Caucasian as understood by Americans racial tables, we are not Hispanics,<sup>22</sup> we are not Latinos, we are not African-American... we are the others.

### **(Illegal) Immigration and Theology**

The most recent and most pertinent literature about the interaction of theology, immigration and ministry is found in the journal published by the Hispanic Theological

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>22</sup> Alan P. Marcus wrote an interesting article in which he explores this common misclassification of Brazilians by Americans. In short, he writes: “A number of the diverse populations who migrated to Brazil include: Portugal, Italy, Poland, France, Germany, Lebanon, Syria, Japan, Russia, Austria, Turkey all of which are disengaged from the Hispanic-Latino paradigms. Brazilians don't belong to an illusory Hispanic or Latino ‘race.’” Alan P. Marcus, “Once again: Brazilians Are Not Hispanic” Brazzil.com <http://www.brazzil.com/2003/html/articles/oct03/p112oct03.htm> (accessed February 6, 2007).

Initiative in the Fall of 2006. This 10<sup>th</sup> issue of “Perspectivas” Occasional Papers brings two articles, plus the “2006 Hispanic Theological Initiative Summer Workshop Lecture: *Immigration: Facts, Theology and Ministry*,” which comprises of four papers. Below, I highlight the rich contributions I gathered from three of these documents. As the series’ title says, it shows perspectives about the issue and in this case the perspective in from first generation immigrants and second or third generation of immigrants.

“To Welcome the Stranger: The Myths and Realities of Illegal Immigration”<sup>23</sup>

Patricia Fernández-Kelly’s material comes from the perspective of gathering facts, debunking myths and pointing out to God’s view of immigration policies. Starting with a short history of the immigration waves in the USA, she gives attention to the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act, and Operation Gatekeeper, established in the 90’s, both of which intended to stop the continuous flow of *illegal*<sup>24</sup> immigrants. The 1993 NAFTA agreement also shows the incongruities of immigration policies because it opens up the borders for corporations to establish themselves abroad, yet refuses to include in the free trade the possibility for workers to move away themselves, if they wish to do so. In other words, the document allows organizations to “immigrate” in search of better returns for its investments, but it denies individual workers the possibility to immigrate as well. They want to make all their profit using the labor force found in their target country.

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<sup>23</sup> Patricia Fernández-Kelly, “To Welcome the Stranger: The Myths and Realities of Illegal Immigration,” *Perspectivas Occasional Papers* 10, ed. Rubén Rosario Rodríguez (Fall 2006): 9-22.

<sup>24</sup> I use italics when the author uses the word “illegal” when referring to undocumented immigrants.

Although she focuses primarily on Mexican and Centro American immigration perspectives, the author points out ten facts about immigration, both legal and illegal, which I summarize and paraphrase below:

- 1- Most immigrants of the USA come from Mexico.
- 2- There's almost no unemployment among first generation immigrants. They take whatever work they find, and they do find some work to do.
- 3- Most illegal immigrants pay taxes.
- 4- Most illegal immigrants do not use public assistance for fear of deportation.
- 5- Most immigrants whether documented or undocumented, support the rules and culture of the USA.
- 6- More than 90% of immigrants speak English to some extent, even though they prefer their mother tongue to communicate among themselves.
- 7- All attempts to stop illegal immigration have failed because the demand for labor is bigger than the supply provided legally. There is disparity in the number of visas provided per country since the size of the country of origin is not considered in the making of policies (ex. Mexico and small countries of Oceania receive the same allotment of visas per year).
- 8- Studies show that first generation immigrants demonstrate better health than the Americans in general.
- 9- At least 1/3 of *illegal* immigrants entered the country as minors, brought by their parents, with no choice over the matter.
- 10- In the age of globalization, immigration between Mexico and the USA will continue unabated.

Fernández-Kelly poses a question of high interest to this discussion, “On Whose Side is God?” Again, her answer is based on the realities of Mexican immigrants, but her argument sheds some light into the issue. First, she highlights the contradiction of the American philosophy, which it tries to spread throughout the world, of capitalism, free market, opportunity and self-reliance, and the fact that America denies these opportunities to people who come here. “The assault against illegal immigrants is not only an attack against persons and families but also an affront to knowledge.”<sup>25</sup> Secondly, the argument against illegal immigration and the spirit of xenophobia in America is addressed. Americans like to say that they are not against immigration, but only against those who break the law to immigrate. If everyone would wait orderly for their turn to get a visa, we would not have a problem with immigration in this country, goes the argument. But this position does not consider the fact that not all people have the same options. It is one thing to say to someone who just want to get a “better life” to wait, it is an entirely different circumstance to say “wait” to someone who either moves away or has no way to make a living and support the family. Thirdly, Americans have made progress in this country by abandoning bad laws in the past. A good example of that are the American Civil Rights movements abandoning the law that legalized Jim Crow practices. In the author’s words, “those who sanctimoniously advocate respect for the law might have, in a different era, supported segregationist norms...”<sup>26</sup> Fourthly, she concludes that because God is clearly on the side of the suffering throughout the Old and New Testaments, the same remains true today, and those who uphold the law at the expense of humanity will find God against them. Finally, she states that these current

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

laws are not going to achieve their purpose “to curtail the flow of people seeking alternatives in the U.S. but they may achieve a different and unexpected outcome – the creation of a hostile climate in which the children of once hopeful immigrants will scoff at the purported merits of democracy, opportunity, and fair treatment.”<sup>27</sup>

If anything, Fernández-Kelly’s article stirs up the issue of just laws which is a major, yet frequently forgotten part of the current discussion about immigration. Sides seem to have been taken: one with those who are law-abiding citizens, and the other with those who are “law-breakers.” However, the laws themselves might be to blame for this controversy.

“Immigration and Theology: Reflections by an Implicated Theologian”<sup>28</sup>

Written by Orlando O. Espín, from a Roman Catholic perspective, this article brings three very interesting elements to the discussion. First, the author offers that society’s globalization is constantly moving people around in masses instead of only individually, as well as changing the need of territory as a major component for people’s identities. According to Espín, it is naïve to expect that the world will become a *global village* and still imagine that people will want to stay put.<sup>29</sup> A second contribution is the idea that “immigrants are *not* and *cannot* be considered “aliens” or “foreigners” among Christians. Immigrants, on the contrary, are always valued as “neighbors,” and we all know the New Testament’s repeated and emphatic command to love our neighbor – regardless of the

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>28</sup> Orlando O. Espín, “Immigration and Theology: Reflections by an Implicated Theologian,” *Perspectivas Occasional Papers* 10, ed. Rubén Rosario Rodríguez (Fall 2006): 37-49.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 44.

neighbor's virtues or lack thereof.”<sup>30</sup> Thirdly, immigration becomes the contemporary definition of the “‘pilgrim’ condition so emphatically taught by the Scriptures and required of all who hope to participate in the Reign of God.”<sup>31</sup> A “church on the move” is expressed by immigration and stirs up the need to rethink ecclesiology and dogmas.

“Beyond Hospitality: Implications of Im/migration for  
Teología y Pastoral de Conjunto”<sup>32</sup>

Also writing from a Roman Catholic perspective, Carmen M. Nanko-Fernández’ article uncaps more areas which cry out for further development and work. The concept of “cultural amnesia” by which third generation immigrants consider themselves “all American,” forgetting their own ancestors’ plight of immigration and becoming unable to identify or even sympathize with the new immigrants, who are now in what was once these third generation immigrants’ great-parents’ shoes is brought out clearly to be considered. How do we minister in a way that heals this lack of understanding of white Americans who might know the facts about their ancestry but at the same time might deny the fact that their own family might have been at one point the “*illegals*” of their times? The author goes on to classify ministry to undocumented immigrants under the field of social justice. On the topic of language, she writes: “Labeling human beings as illegals and/or aliens desensitizes individuals and communities to our shared humanity

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>32</sup> Carmen M. Nanko-Fernández, “Beyond Hospitality: Implications of Im/migration for Teología y Pastoral de Conjunto,” *Perspectivas Occasional Papers* 10, ed. Rubén Rosario Rodríguez (Fall 2006): 51-62.

that is grounded in our being created in the divine image. Humans are not illegal, actions are; and migration is a human right with responsibilities not a criminal act.”<sup>33</sup> The calling of the church, then, would be to have a prophetic voice in awakening lost memories (i.e. “my history also contains immigration within”) to cultivate solidarity, to be careful with the language used to speak about immigrants (i.e. “I understand I’m talking about a human being”) and to respect the stories of each immigrant. In the concept of hospitality, there is a power given to the one who can either offer or deny it. This paradigm fails to recognize that a stranger is not only the one who comes from another country, but a stranger is also the one who lives in the land to which the traveler comes.

*Where the Nations Meet: The Church in a Multicultural World*<sup>34</sup>

Stephen A. Rhodes writes from the perspective of a multicultural church pastor’s praxis. Chapter seven is entitled: “The Alien Among You” and it seeks to demonstrate the “Principle: A multicultural church is a contrast community.” In my understanding, the concept of a multicultural church is really addressing the intention of gathering people from many cultures and backgrounds in one local church, for there is no other Church if not a multicultural one. The Church is multicultural when all manifestations of it (local church, house churches, cell groups, etc.) are considered as one body. So, although the writer deals with local church issues, I am applying his principles to the Church as a whole. Yes, the multicultural church is a contrast community simply by the clashing of backgrounds and theologies of the people who compose it. While Christian love is

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>34</sup> Stephen A. Rhodes, *Where the Nations Meet: The Church in a Multicultural World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998).

preached and heard of often from the pulpit, it is applied to most all situations, yet the exception is very frequently there, when no mention is made of loving your undocumented neighbor. Preachers go as far as proclaiming that the love of the gospel reaches even the unlovable (ex., no matter what this person has done or is doing; domestic violence is sometimes dealt with by the pastors routinely telling the wife to love and submit to the husband regardless), but when it comes to loving the alien that has no documentation, things seem to take a different shape and provoke different responses. All of a sudden these aliens are *sinners*, committing the *unpardonable sin* of being in this territory, uninvited and unapproved. For that reason, they are seen as stubborn sinners that could and should repent of their sin and pack and go back to where they came from, cleaning up their act. About the rejection of immigrants by Americans as a whole, by Christians and non-Christians alike, Rhodes writes:

Historically speaking, every period of large immigration in America has been followed by anti-immigrant sentiment and restrictive legislation. With the last fifteen years constituting the largest foreign-born migration in the history of the United States, it should not be surprising that we now find ourselves in a period marked by xenophobia and nativism.<sup>35</sup>

Through his experience in pastoring undocumented immigrants, Rhodes has felt the tension in church ministry between following the letter of the law and encouraging those immigrants to remain in the USA in a hidden status. He experienced the difficulty of dealing with identification issues among undocumented immigrants, which almost prevented two of his church members from legally marrying in the USA. Considering that the book was written in 1998 one can only imagine how much this problem has escalated since the terrorist attacks of September/2001. Identification issues have become

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 126.



a major problem among immigrants, both in legal and illegal status. As a matter of fact, even American-born people are dealing with the ID issue as a much more serious matter than ever before (ex. identity theft has been wide-spread in recent years). By simply encouraging the members to follow the letter of the law in these situations, the pastor might find himself facing a wall, cornered between advising them not to break the law of the land, and acquiescing to the notion that if left as is, they will sooner or later break the law of God. For, if two singles desire to marry and cannot do so legally because the county clerks demand so many documents they do not have, is it just to require them to never marry? Will they not be led into temptation and end up living together without a legal marriage?

Rhodes also writes about Leviticus 19, a Bible passage where God commands his people to be holy. God's call to holiness in his people is based on the fact that He is holy. If we do not serve God, then we are not bound by this call. However, if we do, then we must surrender our own self-righteousness and look at what he calls us to be and to do, as a holy people. In my observations, I've noticed that if I were to bring up the issue of holiness to a non-immigrant in America as it relates to illegal immigration issues, they would take on the "I'm holy because I obey God" position in the conversation, to begin with, and leave the undocumented immigrants as those playing the "unholy" part. Yet, the Word of God challenges this position head on.

Specifically, the holiness to which we are called as a people of God in Leviticus 19 is marked by the honoring of parents, reverence for God, keeping the Sabbath, refraining from stealing, telling the truth – things American Protestants have typically considered qualities of holiness. But this code of holiness goes a step further. Being holy as God is holy also requires harvesting fields so that food is left for the hungry to glean, treating the handicapped with mercy, acting with justice toward the poor, not favoring the rich or powerful over the weak, treating

older adults with respect, and treating the alien, the immigrant, as we would treat a citizen of our country.<sup>36</sup>

Could it be that American Christians are the ones who are not following God's commands of being holy, by mistreating or despising the alien?

*Exclusion & Embrace:*

*A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation*<sup>37</sup>

Miroslav Volf discusses the issues of identity and otherness, along with the conflicts that come up from them. He writes that although the three traditional solutions to these conflicts – a) Universalist Option: the multiplication of differences must be controlled and the universal values must be spread; b) Communitarian Option: communal differences are to be celebrated and if the universal values are spread, they will lead to oppression and boredom; and, c) Postmodern Option: universal values and particular identities must be avoided – are in many aspects radically different, they all focus on social arrangements. He forgoes the discussion on social arrangements, not because they are not important to him but because they are more in the realm of Christian economists, political scientists, etc. instead of theologians.

In his discussion of the theology of the cross, the author considers the theme of divine solidarity with victims, but picks up another theme: divine self-donation for the enemies and their reception into the eternal communion of God. In his view, the promise of the cross is built upon the text of Romans 15:7 “Welcome one another, therefore, as

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 131.

<sup>37</sup> Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness and Reconciliation* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996).

Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.” The metaphor of “welcoming” is paralleled by the metaphor of “embrace,” that interrelates three themes: the doctrine of God – the mutuality of self-giving love in the Trinity; the doctrine of Christ – the outstretched arms of Jesus on the cross for the “godless;” the doctrine of salvation – the open arms of the “father” receiving the “prodigal.” The principal thought of the metaphor of the prodigal son is that the will to give ourselves to other and “welcome” them, to readjust our identities to make space for them, is prior to any judgment about others, except that of identifying them in their humanity.

Although the “will to embrace” is the author’s major point, he considers the struggle against deception, injustice, and violence as indispensable. His perspective is that for the embrace to occur, it is necessary for truth to be said and justice to be done. He defends that the clash between the “grace” of self-donation and the “demand” of truth and justice must be done by humans in a non-violent way, leaving to God the prerogative of exercising violence against “false prophets” and “beasts” if they refuse to be redeemed by the wounds they inflicted on the Crucified.

The evil of “exclusion” is the backdrop of the practice of the “embrace” with its accompanying struggle against deception, injustice and violence. He also deals with gender reconciliation, which is the most encompassing and fundamental relation between “identity” and “otherness.”

Volf’s concept of “double vision” (building understanding by seeing from each other’s perspectives) is important to the Christian minister in relationships of various forms, to the church body as we worship together with individuals and families of diverse backgrounds, languages and cultures, and as Christians who are called to demonstrate

love and seek peace. As it relates to immigration issues, his concepts are invaluable in that through them he reminds Christians of the call to love their “enemies,” or “the others.”

### **Illegal Immigration and Ethics**

The biggest challenge for me in interacting with the materials in Ethics is that they were clearly written with a local mindset. By that I mean that whenever authors address the issue of injustice, community or oppression, for example, they always seem to have in mind the local challenges, a domestic point of view, with the community inside the United States (in the case of American authors) as a point of reference.

The concepts presented by the authors seem to take on a whole new life and meaning when applied across borders in our current “global village.” The most pungent example of this is when the reader is encouraged (or allowed to) by an author to resist unjust governments by fleeing the situation, as found in many situations in the Bible. It might work well when there is a problem of racism, for example, in the South area of the USA and someone decides to migrate to the Northern states in search of relief from oppression. But things change totally when the oppression is wide spread in one’s country, the person decides to flee from the oppression by immigrating abroad, and is met with both more opportunities for survival and hope, as well as laws that promise to make life in the new country as oppressive as in the country of origin. Yet, in this new situation the immigrant sees that the price is high but worth it, since he can still provide for his basic needs (food, shelter and clothing) for better or worse, and function in society albeit

in a strictly limited way (banking, driving, seeking healthcare, marrying, seeking police protection, etc.)

With this in mind, I proceed to review some books on Christian Ethics and offer my response to their standings.

*Biblical Ethics and Social Change*<sup>38</sup>

Stephen Charles Mott writes from a perspective that is valuable to this thesis. Not only does he bring up important issues, he deals with them integrating personal and social responsibility. Where other authors deal with issues only on the personal level, Mott recognizes that biblical ethics is mostly expressed when it goes all the way to promote social change.

The concept of justice is studied in Chapter 4, entitled “God’s Justice and Ours,” and it brings clarification that contributes to a sound analysis of the interaction of justice and illegal immigration.

Mott begins by expounding on the different terms used in the Bible, in Hebrew and Greek, which have been translated as justice and sometimes as righteousness. We have become used to thinking about justice in its negative connotation of punishment. Mott establishes that there are different kinds of justice in social systems: distributive justice, which governs the distribution of benefits to society, and retributive (criminal) justice, which deals with the penalty for breaking the law. The Hebrew term *sedaqah* “deals with God’s *positive actions in creating and preserving community*, particularly on

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<sup>38</sup> Stephen C. Mott, *Biblical Ethics and Social Change* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1982).

behalf of marginal members thereof.”<sup>39</sup> Another Hebrew word *mispat* “often communicates relief, release, and deliverance.”<sup>40</sup> The Greek word *dikaioyne* becomes *sedaqah*’s counterpart in the New Testament, with similar positive uses.

Mott makes it clear that love and justice are not opposing concepts in Scripture, but rather, they are continuous and complementary, or overlapping. In fact, Christians are to be agents of God’s love, grace and justice. Since we first received them from God, we are supposed to pass them along to our fellow humans.

Whereas with Aristotelian justice people are judged in a way that by the distribution of justice they can be restituted to their own previous position in society, biblical justice (creative justice) does not only *maintain* justice, but creates it. “Scriptures do not allow the presupposition of a condition in which groups or individuals are denied the ability to participate fully and equally in the life of the society. For this reason, justice is primarily spoken of by the biblical writers as activity on behalf of the disadvantaged.”<sup>41</sup> According to Mott, the Bible’s way of distributing justice implies the distribution of more benefits to those who have less, in order to bring back equality, or to balance the equation. In other words, those who need more to be at a situation that provides for their basic needs and allows their full participation in society should receive more. Ps 107:39-41 “When they are diminished and brought low through oppression, trouble, and sorrow, he pours contempt on princes and makes them wander in trackless wastes; but he raises up the needy out of distress, and makes their families like flocks.”

The Bible also commands us to do justice, and puts justice as a preferred form of piety than sacrifice, as we can see in Am 5: 24-25 “But let justice roll down like waters,

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 62-63.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 65.

and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. Did you bring to me sacrifices and offerings the forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel?,” and Mi 6:6-8 “With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” and also in Proverbs 21:3 “To do righteousness and justice is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice.”

Lastly, Mott touches on the issue of justice and government. He states that it is impossible for us to understand a society without looking at its laws and because of that, we cannot separate justice from coercion, law and government.<sup>42</sup> Parallel to that, if we are to obey God’s command to do justice, we must take a closer look at the laws of the land, analyzing and ultimately taking action to support, promote change, or overturn the current legal system.

When Christians are motivated by God’s justice, our loyalties are put to the test. We may find ourselves sympathizing with people whom we criticized before, the weak ones, the oppressed, and distressed. We cannot serve two masters, the government and God. We must choose to obey God. The only way Christians can have this zeal for justice is if this desire is placed in their hearts by the Holy Spirit, which will become a distinctive in their lives.

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 79.

Norman L. Geisler's book provides a chapter on the issue of Civil Disobedience, from which we can obtain some material to consider. On the topic of whether or not it is correct for a Christian to disobey civil laws, he presents some options:

1. Anarchism – which he chooses not to treat in the book for its extreme position of never obeying civil authority is anti-biblical as a whole.

2. Radical Patriotism states that civil disobedience is never right. Geisler refutes the correction of that option by saying that the Scriptures which its defenders use to justify it are used out of context (ex. in Acts 4:19 Peter blatantly refuses to obey the command to stop preaching the gospel, which proves that although Christians are to obey human authorities, this obedience is not without some limitations).<sup>44</sup>

3. Biblical Submissionism is split in two positions:

3.1 – The Antipromulgation Position maintains that disobedience of government when it promulgates unbiblical laws agrees with the actions of Christians who refuse to obey laws that go against the Word of God.

3.2 – The Anticompulsion Position defends that Christians should disobey civil laws when they compel us to do evil. Geisler gives various biblical examples of this position (Ex 1:15-21 – the Hebrew midwives refusing to kill baby boys; Dan 3 – the Hebrew slaves in Babylonia refused to bow down in worship to the statue that King

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<sup>43</sup> Norman L Geisler, *Christian Ethics: Options and Issues* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1993).

<sup>44</sup> Geisler, *Christian Ethics*, 241.



Nebuchadnezzar had erected and demanded everyone to worship; Dan 6 – Daniel’s disobedience to the law that prohibited him from praying to God, among others).

Dealing with the issue of how to disobey oppressive laws, Geisler stands with the option of refusal to obey instead of revolting against the government. He, along with the other authors in *Ethics*, writes from a domestic USA perspective, not considering the demands of globalization in our Christian ethics thinking. I infer that because if we apply his thinking to global migration movements, the implications go far and broad. He writes that “biblical civil disobedience does not reject the government’s punishment, but accepts the penalties for disobeying the law. For example, the three Hebrew children refuse to worship the idol, but they do not refuse to go into the fiery furnace.”<sup>45</sup> Then, he states that “it is legitimate civil disobedience to flee, if possible, from an oppressive government, and not to fight it.”<sup>46</sup> From this we can infer that it is legitimate to flee from the oppression of one’s country (ex. Brazil) and seek another place for living. Whether or not the new country legally accepts the fleeing individual is a question not addressed.

Under the subtitle “how to respond to oppression” the author indicates his opinion that,

Civil disobedience is a bad testimony for a follower of Christ. Christians should be known as law-abiding citizens, not rebels. The best way to effect lasting change in an unjust government is by being a spiritual example, not by revolution. Only when it takes the place of God should we refuse to obey government, and even then we should not revolt against it.<sup>47</sup>

Here are my comments on this paragraph: first, what can he possibly mean by “being a spiritual example” to effect lasting change in an unjust government? When all your family, including your school age children and teenagers work hard and still at the end of the month you cannot make ends meet, are Christians supposed to pray more? Or

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 246-247.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 247.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 251.

wait for angels to come and feed them? Some action from the responsible parties must be expected, and if the government of the country where they live gives them no alternatives but to flee in search of opportunities and for the “daily bread” are they not supposed to go somewhere? And where should they go? Did not so many people in the Bible go to other nations in time of famine in search for food to fight for their subsistence?

Geisler writes that it is acceptable to refuse to obey the government when it is taking the place of God. To what degree is that not also true about the decisions made by the immigration authorities? Immigrants come here for better or worse, with and without visas to try a new life. When they come and remain undocumented they are well aware of the possibility of deportation, and they do submit to the punishment of the government, that is, most do. It is well known among Brazilians that some people are deported and come back as fast as they can, often within the year, only this time with a new identity.

Geisler’s list of how to respond to oppression continues: pray for oppressive governments, work peacefully and legally to change it, disobey oppressive commands, flee oppressive governments, patiently endure suffering. When these guidelines are given to Americans, or any other nationality for that matter, to indicate a path to deal with homegrown injustices, it works smoothly. However, when you throw in international migration dynamics and American xenophobia, his guidelines shake a little bit. For one, he says that the best way to fight oppression in the government is with “the ballot, not the bullet.”<sup>48</sup> I agree. But, in our days’ circumstances, American society as a whole is uniting to toughen up the already oppressive laws, much like the Egyptians in the days following Joseph’s death:

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 252.

Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. And he said to his people, “Behold, **the people of Israel are too many and too mighty for us**. Come, **let us deal shrewdly with them**, lest they multiply, and, if war befall us, they join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land.” Therefore they set taskmasters over them to **afflict them with heavy burdens**; and they built for Pharaoh store-cities, Pithom and Ra-am’ses. But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and the more they spread abroad. And **the Egyptians were in dread of the people of Israel**. So they made the people of Israel serve with rigor, and **made their lives bitter with hard service**, in mortar and brick, and in all kinds of work in the field; in all their work they made them serve with rigor. Ex 1:8-14 (bold mine)

If a question was put on the ballot today asking the American voters whether immigration laws should become more flexible or tougher, I have no doubt that the majority would vote for a more narrowed law. Besides that, undocumented immigrants cannot vote! I am not saying that they should use the bullet, but clearly in the USA the people with the power are the ones who are rejecting the undocumented immigrants and would be the ones able to use the ballot to change the current situation, yes, but to worsen it for the undocumented immigrants. Granted, if we are talking about using the ballot in Brazil, then the Brazilian immigrants here do certainly have a voice there. In fact, voting is not optional in Brazil, but a mandatory obligation. The country has extended voting obligations to Brazilian citizens living outside of Brazilian territory by installing voting polls in some jurisdictions. But again, coming from the experience of corruption upon corruption in the Brazilian government, even the ballot loses its appeal. As we say in Brazil “politicians are all *flour from the same bag*.” The hopes of Brazilians have been shattered so many times that hopelessness prevails.

The author uses the examples of the prophets fleeing from Jezebel (1 Kgs 18) and Jesus’ family fled from Herod (Mt 2) to justify the legitimacy of the alternative of fleeing

from unjust governments. I propose that if you leave one country, you will want to go to another one that would offer something different from what you already had in yours!

The last point I want to interact with Geisler in this chapter is the point he makes about the American Revolution. He clearly states that in light of his exposition of the biblical criteria on the matter it is impossible to justify the American Revolution. So, he asks, what should American Christians do on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July? He proceeds to explain that a difference should be made between the result of a process and the process itself. In his example, we can rejoice in a child born as a result of a rape, although we do not rejoice in the rape itself. Consequently, we can rejoice in the fact that a “great free country” was born out of the American Revolution without agreeing with the revolution itself. Following his train of thought, we could also infer that we can rejoice in an undocumented immigrant’s acquisition of a permanent resident’s visa, no matter what means he might have used to get it (marry a citizen only for the document, use fake documents, etc?)!

### **Illegal Immigration in General**

*Illegal Immigration and Economic Welfare* (Contributions to Economics)<sup>49</sup>

Chisato Yoshida goes deeply into formulas and variables to add to the work on models of illegal immigration published by Bond and Chen (1987). The model used is a “two-country world in which the host country introduces and internal enforcement policy

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<sup>49</sup> Chisato Yoshida, *Illegal Immigration and Economic Welfare*, Contributions to Economics (Heidelberg: Physica-Verlag, 2000).

to catch illegal immigrants working in domestic firms.”<sup>50</sup> Yoshida’s study pursues the effects of illegal immigration both on the economical development of the country of origin as well as the host country. I will reproduce only his conclusions on the study of two variables:

1. The global welfare effects of illegal immigration in the absence of international capital mobility: when money cannot be sent to the country of origin, Yoshida’s conclusion is that “introduction of enforcement by the host country’s government reduces the welfare of the foreign country and reduces global welfare.”<sup>51</sup>
2. The global welfare effects of illegal immigration in the presence of international capital mobility: when money can be sent to the country of origin, Yoshida shows that “enforcement improves the welfare of the host country under some circumstances, improves the welfare of the foreign country, and hence, improves global welfare. ... We conclude that internal enforcement by the host country’s government is *Pareto-improving policy* when international capital mobility exists.”<sup>52</sup>

*International Migration and Global Justice* (Law and Migration)<sup>53</sup>

Satvinder Singh Juss touches on the subject of right of free movement as a basic right of humans. The language of right gives the basis to moral claims, and it becomes

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 35-36.

<sup>53</sup> Satvinder Singh Juss, *International Migration and Global Justice*, Law and Migration (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2006).

critically important to define that freedom of movement (freedom of immigration) is a human right whenever we are dealing with vulnerable individuals and societies. The author points out that although the rising “claim” to the exercise of free movement rights during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, it is the developed world that makes the most restrictions in their laws about it.<sup>54</sup> Restrictions are allowed and expected from governments, however, “exclusions on the grounds ‘of fundamental differences in customs or civilization’ ... is racially discriminatory and inherently inconsistent with the very idea of ‘free entrance of aliens’ which is ‘not [to] be generally and permanently forbidden by a ‘civilized state’.”<sup>55</sup> For countries regulations to be fair and stable they must be based on a system of fundamental values of international mutuality.

Further, the author explains that the heavy financial, economic and human costs of controlling illegal immigration such as border patrol, deportation costs, etc. far exceeds that of legalizing immigrants.

### **The 1.5 Generation – Undocumented Not By Choice**

*Ethnicities: Children of Immigrants in America*<sup>56</sup>

Rubén G. Rumbaut and Alejandro Portes have written many books on the subject of immigrant children. “Ethnicities” is a collection of 10 chapters which address issues from different immigrant communities. The trends of older and more recent immigrant

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>56</sup> Alejandro Portes and Rubén G. Rumbaut, “Conclusion – The Forging of a New America: Lessons for Theory and Policy,” in *Ethnicities: Children of Immigrants in America*, ed. Rubén G. Rumbaut and Alejandro Portes (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2001).

communities are studied by different authors. The following ethnicities are specifically addressed: Mexican Americans, Cuban, Nicaraguans, Filipinos, Vietnamese, Haitian, and West Indian. Although no chapter has been dedicated to the Brazilian ethnicity, most likely because it is a community still taking shape, maturing, and drawing attention from scholars, by exposure to the patterns and variables from these other communities we can have insight into the possible future of the Brazilian second (or one-and-a-half) generation.

Both theories that dominate the writings about the future of immigrants in America seem to be inadequate in light of the community studies expounded upon in the chapters of the book. The first one – assimilation – desires to homogenize immigrants with the American culture, making them “one of us” through the adoption of the English language only, and the acceptance of all American culture’s values as a means to prove that they have “melted.” But there is a “solid body of evidence pointing to a universal shift from American identities to ethnic ones, increasing perceptions of discrimination against one’s own group, and an overall reassertion of heritage and cultural distinctness that bodes ill for predictions of future national homogeneity”<sup>57</sup> that rises against this option.

In the same manner, pluralism does not bring the solution to the matter. Although the children of immigrants carry with them their parents’ culture, they do not give continuation to it in as strong a way as their progenitors. They are born in the USA and as a result, even when they are proud of their origins, they are already a mix of cultures, whether or not they realize it.

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 301.

The melting pot that is usually proclaimed in the USA did not happen, according to Nathan Glazer and Daniel P. Moynihan's 1970's study based in immigrants in New York City. What did happen, they state, is that these immigrants became Americans in their own way, incorporating both their parents' cultures, skills and social networks, and the American culture.

Portes and Rumbaut describe some variables and the results of its interactions systemically, even if they do so limitedly. The first generation background variables are parental human capital, modes of incorporation and family structure. These variables are combined with the intergenerational patterns of dissonant acculturation, consonant acculturation, or selective acculturation that, in turn, interact with the second generation's varied responses to the external obstacles of racial discrimination, labor markets and inner-city subcultures to produce an expected outcome. Although their graph describing these interactions is rather linear, their exposition of the matter recognizes that no linear thought is able to understand the complexity of these elements interrelationship.

Parental human capital refers to the set of skills, experiences and resources the parents bring with them upon immigrating and also the environment that receives them.

Modes of incorporation have the power to allow, delay or bar the utilization of the human capital of the parents. This concept is the authors' theorization of the issue and it "was coined to highlight the basic and separate components of this context of reception, consisting of official policy toward specific nationalities; public receptivity, indifference, or rejection toward them; and the character and resources of preexisting co-ethnic communities."<sup>58</sup> The importance of family structure has to do with the expectations of

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 307.



the parents for their children's future and the specific way their culture relates to parental authority.

As for the intergenerational relations in immigrant families, the three possible paths described by the authors are as follows:

1. Dissonant acculturation – this happens when the children's pace of learning English and American culture is so much faster than their parents' that there is no chance for the parents to catch up. This causes much strife in the family because the children lose respect for their origins and also for their parents' authority. Because working class immigrants tend to follow this path more often than the more educated immigrants, their own poverty serves as a factor that discourages their children to desire to follow in their footsteps. In turn, the kids do not regard their parents' disciplinary acts as highly, resulting in parents that feel like they have lost control of their children. Examples from the Haitian and Nicaraguan communities are given in the book.

2. Consonant acculturation – this happens when parents and children learn the language and culture at almost the same pace and adjust their behavior accordingly. It happens more often when the first generation has good domain of the English language and as a result, they can more easily understand and accompany the changes in their children's lives. The Filipino community is one example of such path.

3. Selective acculturation – this happens when the host culture is learned slowly but the culture of origin remains important and valued in the family. Fluent bilingualism is the component that is mostly identifiable in this pattern. It allows for the second generation to learn and be fluent in the language and culture of the host country, yet respect and function well in their parents' language and culture. A network of support in

the immigrant community makes up for a partial loss of skills in their parents' language. This kind of assimilation provides a good foundation for the second generation to have a better psychosocial adjustment and achievement based on the fact that cross-generational bonds are preserved and the children's identity is validated. The Vietnamese in San Diego and the Cubans in Miami are good examples of this type of assimilation.

Among the barriers to adaptation, the most important is racial discrimination. "The new second generation comes overwhelmingly from Latin America, the Caribbean, and Asia, and the majority of its members are considered nonwhite according to American racial norms."<sup>59</sup> Studies have shown that there is a clear correlation between the color of the skin and the level of racial and ethnic discrimination – the darker the skin, the more discrimination.

Labor markets have changed from an old industrial base toward information-driven service economy which splits the labor market into low-paying menial jobs and high-paying non-manual jobs for highly qualified individuals. Taking into consideration the interaction with the other variables it is expected that some immigrant second generation children will soar high beyond what their parents ever achieved in the educational and professional areas, while other communities will see their children having to choose either to fall into the same menial jobs their parents accepted to do in America, but that they do not feel satisfied with, or else, they will find a deviant alternative to making money.

The external obstacle of the inner-city subculture is a byproduct of the racial discrimination and alienation that produces fear in the parents who, although have high expectations for their children, also fear that they will fall into deviant lifestyles. In the

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 309.

extreme of their fear, some parents make the radical decision to send their children to their own country of origin, so they can be raised by family and/or friends in their own culture, away from the American streets. The message from the streets and schools can be accepted or rejected by the children, and a highly influential factor in this decision is what kind of acculturation the family is going through.

In the Brazilian community, I have seen both the consonant and the selective acculturation. More often than not, for some reason, selective acculturation happens with Christians (although surely there are always exceptions). The authors have not specifically included the factor of the church as an influence, and faith in God as a regulator of behavior. I have seen these two models repeatedly in the Brazilian community. The parents do not speak any English when they come to the USA. Upon arrival, their children are enrolled in school and immediately start learning the language and values of this new society. Parents go straight to work, usually among Brazilians, do all their business (banking, grocery shopping, movie watching, etc.) using the Portuguese language, with fellow Brazilians, and do not put priority in learning English for a period, while they try to stabilize the finances. With time, roles are changed and the children become the official English speakers of the family and even in some situations, try to control their parents by threatening to call the police and falsely claim to be abused by their parents when the parents try to discipline them. A fractioning of the family is inevitable, and in many cases the children do get arrested, and some times deported for their involvement with drugs and robberies.

Other common story is that of the parents who come with no English at all or basic skills in the language, but put priority in learning it and getting involved with the

new culture to be well informed of what their children are exposed to. Although with strong accents and maybe a type of job that the children do not want to perform, these parents maintain their authority and involvement in the raising of their children and are successful to facilitate the achievements their children desire to reach, to the limit the laws allow them to.

The authors expound on the importance of social capital, which cannot be bought but come as a gift to the children of immigrants. These are social networks that reinforce the message the parents are giving their children. Whenever the parents may get close to losing their influence, their social network remains strongly in place and provides access to the encouragement necessary for the children to push through the hardships and pursue a higher education, and tap into new opportunities for personal improvement. This is exactly where the Brazilian church comes in strongly with youth groups, retreats, Bible studies, services and small groups.

In reference to the lessons for policy, the authors note that:

... the policy positions that have garnered most favor with the American electorate are more likely to promote this dismal outcome rather than prevent it. Nativism, which seeks to reduce immigration to the minimum and isolate those who stay in a position of social inferiority, triggers predictable reactive processes leading to ethnic reassertiveness, withdrawal from normal mobility channels, and hostility toward mainstream institutions.<sup>60</sup>

The view of assimilationists that would prefer to see immigrant children totally immersed in American culture is the most dangerous for the second generation, because in promoting Americanism, they encourage these children to deny their roots and clash with the family structure. Multiculturalism, on the other hand does not provide the best answer either, because it proposes to keep cultures permanently separated. Selective

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 315.

acculturation provides the best path by offering a reconciliation and integration of the past and future, the origin and the offspring, by reinforcing the value of family, social networks, ethnic identity and language.

*Filhos da imigração: A segunda geração de brasileiros em Connecticut*<sup>61</sup>

*(Children of Immigration: The Second Generation of Brazilians in Connecticut)*

This material by Gustavo Hamilton Menezes, is a summarized version of the core concepts and chapters of his Master's Dissertation in Social Anthropology, presented in Brazil, at Universidade de Brasília, in 2002. This shortened version became a chapter of the book *Fronteiras Cruzadas: Etnicidade, Gênero e Redes Sociais* (*Crossed Borders: Ethnicity, Gender and Social Networks – my translation*), organized by Ana Cristina Braga Martes and Soraya Fleischer.

Menezes writes with the background of experience acquired in two 3-month stays in Danbury, CT. As such, his writing is informed by short-term observations, interviews and participation in the Brazilian Community of that area.

He begins by defining his classification of Second Generation. In his work it involves:

1. Youth born and partially raised in Brazil. They have come to the USA with some memories of Brazil and some attachment to the culture.

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<sup>61</sup> Gustavo Hamilton Menezes, "Filhos da imigração: A segunda geração de brasileiros em Connecticut," (Children of immigration: The second generation of Brazilians in Connecticut) in *Fronteiras Cruzadas* (Crossed frontiers), comp. Ana Cristina Braga Martes and Soraya Resende Fleischer (São Paulo: Paz e Terra, 2003).

2. Youth born in Brazil and brought over to the USA by their parents when they were so young that they have no recollection of Brazil. He points out that some scholars identify this group as 1.5 generation.
3. USA-born children of Brazilian immigrants. They do not know Brazil and many times, because the parents are “out-of-status” immigration-wise, they have much smaller chances of traveling there.

Young children learn Brazilian culture through their relationships, beginning with the baby-sitter arrangement. The vast majority of Brazilian mothers choose Brazilian baby-sitters. The cost is cheaper, the culture is shared, young ones pick up the parents’ language from early days, and it is easier for the mother to communicate with the sitter about her standards for the care of her children. These Brazilian kids learn about the world in a dialectical manner always receiving, from the parents and whatever Brazilian media channels they are exposed to, a constant flow of opinion-forming information is given as to define what it means to be Brazilian. At the same time, they are exposed to the American lifestyle, language and culture, informing them of what it means to be American. Second generation Brazilian children, born to a couple of Brazilian parents, are bilingual, bicultural and form a dichotomic identity behaving one way within the Brazilian context (family, church, clubs) and another way when with Americans (school, stores, employment) or splitting the behaviors and identity between domestic and public.

About the role of the church in the identity formation of the second generation, the author writes,

In churches, more than in any other domestic institution, the second generation youth have the notion of belonging to a community of the same kind, to a group. The simple fact that churches are able to gather a large number of Brazilians – men and women, children, youth, adults and elderly – in the same space, gives

precious details so that children and youth that do not know Brazil develop a mental scheme that will tell them what it is to be Brazilian.<sup>62</sup>

The issue of language takes a very important position for the understanding of the formation of the second generation's identity. Because they are exposed to English-speaking education, and the country itself speaks English as the official language, these children grow up with English as their main language, and they pride themselves in being able to speak it without a Brazilian accent (my observation of the language is that everyone has an accent, be it from a State/Region in the USA – ex. Boston vs. Texas – or from another country – ex. England vs. India). Rapidly the children become the spokesperson for the family, many times taking on the responsibility of being a translator/interpreter for their parents, be it at the bank, in business transaction or in a parent-teacher conference in school.

Differently from the recent past, nowadays bilingualism is valued as an asset, whereas before it was looked upon as a threat to the national sovereignty. Because of this, many second-generation Brazilians are studying and desiring to keep and improve their Portuguese skills instead of forsaking it in favor of developing better English. Some schools and Brazilian Community Associations offer Portuguese lessons to children, and the parents are enrolling them in.

In school, a most important forming institution in the life of the children, second-generation Brazilian kids are politically raised with the *American way of life* being exalted. Consumerism, materialism, and the American symbols (the flag, the Presidents, the White House, etc.) are revered and praised. Children promptly understand that to be accepted in this culture, they must conform to its shape and value systems. At the pledge

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<sup>62</sup> Menezes, "Filhos da imigração," 165.

to the flag ceremony, all children, no matter their roots and nationality, are expected to participate of this ritual of devotion to the nation. “Some Brazilians report that, after insistence, they were waived from this solemnity, acquiring the right to remain silent during the pledge. However, in the majority of times, this is not an option ...”<sup>63</sup>

### Conclusions About the Available Literature

There is a clear difference in the way Brazilian, Spanish-speaking, and other immigrant or non-American authors address the issue of immigration. Whereas white Theologians will speak of immigrants as *the stranger*, immigrants see themselves as *your neighbor*. While Americans in general (I assume the responsibility for the slight chance I might be wrong) desire their own culture to remain untouched, *unstained*, immigrants are open to inter-exchange of cultures, be it in language, arts, values or even in religion.

The content of books written by white Americans, even Christians assume a position of “come on, let’s help out these poor people, they need us.” While this statement might not be totally wrong, the other side of the statement “come on, let’s help out these people, we need them” is never established.

Framingham, MA is an example of a city in the USA where Brazilian immigration has revitalized its downtown are to a point that the city now thrives, when clearly before immigration its future was decreed as a ghost town, as the Boston Globe Editorial puts it “Downtown Framingham, once a ghost town, is now a Little Brazil.”<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 171.

<sup>64</sup> Editorial, “Boa Vinda a Framingham!” *The Boston Globe*, July 31, 2006.  
[http://www.boston.com/news/globe/editorial\\_opinion/editorials/articles/2006/07/31/boa\\_vinda\\_a\\_framingham/?page=1](http://www.boston.com/news/globe/editorial_opinion/editorials/articles/2006/07/31/boa_vinda_a_framingham/?page=1) (accessed February 6, 2007).



Yet, the current tensions among immigrants and white Americans is such that there are constant inter-exchanges in the regional newspaper (Metropolitan West) in which once again the immigrant writer (thankfully the immigrant community in the Metro West area has a Brazilian journalist to speak up for them) is always combating false accusations and trying to bring on some real facts for which the city might reconsider its attitude toward Brazilians and maybe be grateful for their coming. The least of these would not be the fact that Brazilians saved Framingham from bankruptcy.

There is a desperate need of more Christian writings on this issue from the perspective of the immigrant. Theology, which is always local<sup>65</sup>, Ethics, which is always biased, and Law, which is always politically influenced, must have immigrant representation.

I found two great gaps in the literature on Brazilian immigration to New England (Massachusetts included). First, there is mostly non-Christians writers studying and publishing on this specific issue, and as a result, God, churches and ministry are not very much considered. The exception happens when the scholar considers church as a social structure for the community, but even then they usually disconsider the message of the Gospel and the power of God.

Secondly, whenever Christian authors try to touch on the issue one of two things usually happens: 1- the writer does not differentiate the Ethics of ministering to documented and undocumented immigrants. This could be defended by saying that they want to extend the same treatment to both categories, but somehow I don't think that is the case. I think the authors are omitting the distinction because of its tension and confrontational character. God forbid we would "accuse" our churches (ministers and

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<sup>65</sup> Nanko-Fernández, *Beyond Hospitality*, 54.

members alike) to be racist towards immigrants! 2- There is a lack of interaction between the disciplines. Theology tries to stay on its realm alone, and Ethics does the same. But the interaction between these two fields is critical – mandatory – for the church today if we are really interested in following Jesus, and obeying the whole Bible in an intelligent and informed way.

Having studied what other authors say about the many facets that must be considered for an enlightened discussion about immigration, the Christian reader is also interested in considering what the Bible says about it. We propose to do that in the following chapter.

## Chapter 3

### Theology of Urban Ministry Applied to Immigration

As we approach the Bible to find out what it says about the church's ministry to undocumented immigrants we must be careful and take our biases into account. The fact that I'm writing from an immigrant's perspective is sure to influence my *reading glasses*, but that cannot be avoided and as such I invite and welcome those with other interpretations and understandings to write and continue producing works that will eventually open the way for the Church to consider, debate, pray and decide on an approach to ministry that involves undocumented immigrants.

Although my focus is on the church's ministry to undocumented immigrants in the context of the Brazilian community in the Greater Boston area, I will develop a general Theology of Urban Ministry applied to immigration as a whole (both legal and illegal). The development of the understanding of one's Theology of Urban Ministry becomes important to this discussion because the majority of immigrants choose to live in the city<sup>1</sup> and because the city is a sending agent from which change starts and is amplified by means of being spread out by the people that temporarily live in the city and eventually move out to another city, to the suburbs, or even another country. The Theological basis for the ministry of the church to undocumented immigrants will be provided by the three parts of my Theological Frame of Urban Ministry which are: a

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<sup>1</sup> Leif Jensen, "The Demographic Diversity of Immigrants and Their Children," in *Ethnicities: Children of Immigrants in America*, ed. Alejandro Portes and Rubén G. Rumbaut (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2001), 21-56. He notes that "about 65 percent of the first generation and 61 percent of the second live in the northeastern or western states."

Theology of Place (context), a Theology of Peace (ministry) and a Theology of Prayer (spirituality).

### **A Theology of Place: Context**

Throughout Scriptures it is clear that God loves the city. The main reason for God's love for the city is that it is a place with high concentration of humans and God loves people (according to Jn 3:16). The book of Jonah tells the story of God's demonstration of His love for the city of Nineveh. Though that city did not worship God (it was God's enemy) and was committed to its evil ways, God sent a prophet with a call for repentance and a promise of destruction if they refused to change their ways. The response of the city was overwhelmingly positive and God did not destroy that city, which ultimately was His purpose in sending the prophet. Jonah, however, reacted negatively to God's mercy on the city. As an object lesson for Jonah, God creates a plant to protect him from the heat and the next day, the plant withers, leaving Jonah unprotected. Again, Jonah's response was negative. God's conversation with the most successful prophet in the Bible (everyone converted because of the message he brought) yet the unhappiest one (he just did not understand God's mercy and compassion on the people), about the plant and the city of Nineveh implies that He works for the city:

And the LORD said, "You pity the plant, for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night, and perished in a night. And should not I pity Nin'evah, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?" Jon 4:10-11

Jonah was angry that the plant he did nothing to cultivate had withered, while God was having mercy on a city that He calls “great.” Although God did not say directly that He worked in and for the city, we can imply that He did so because as He mentions the plant and Jonah’s pity for it, He says that Jonah had not labored or made it grow. In contrast to that, the reader can gather that God had put in work for the city and made it grow, and now it has become a great city, full of people – though ignorant – and animals. God simply loves people. He loves the world, including animals and nature. Because God is love<sup>2</sup>, He loves cities just as much as He loves tribes, rural communities, nations, each individual person and He could not love the cities less (or more) than He does other places. Even our final destination, as the people of God is a city, the Holy City, the New Jerusalem.<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, God does not have preferences for any cities or people groups. He has exercised liberation for other peoples too, not only for Israel through the biblically registered Exodus. His love and desire to deliver was extended, even in Old Testament times, beyond Israel’s borders to other Gentile nations:

“Are you not like the Ethiopians to me, O people of Israel?” says the LORD. “Did I not bring up Israel from the land of Egypt, and the Philistines from Caphtor and the Syrians from Kir?” Am 9:7

In a time when the people of Israel thought they were so special and so uniquely loved by God, He tells them that he has also dealt with other nations in their favor, delivering them. When God sees sin in the city He desires to bring the people to repentance and does not take pleasure in destruction. He calls His people to shine the

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<sup>2</sup> 1 Jn 1:8 “He who does not love does not know God; for God is love.”

<sup>3</sup> Rv 3:12 “He who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God; never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem which comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name.”

light of the gospel<sup>4</sup> and express His love, purposes and plans among the people.<sup>5</sup> The United States is a country loved by God. God deeply loves the American people. However, He loves all other peoples and all other countries just the same.<sup>6</sup> As a result of having been raised overly “patriots” American Christians might overdo the love for their country and end up converting it to thinking about the USA as “so special and uniquely loved by God” that they might need to hear that God also deals and loves the other nations exactly the same as he loves the USA.<sup>7</sup>

The starting point of a theology of presence in the city is the need for Christians to be there, in the city, living, working, going to school, etc. But simply being somewhere does not communicate does not incarnate the gospel message. People can buy houses and live in a determined location but never even get to know their neighbors, purposely choosing anonymity and cultivating isolation. Being there is of undeniable importance if it is part of an intentional engagement with the community. “White flight”<sup>8</sup> goes against this incarnation, opting instead for separation and alienation.

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<sup>4</sup> Mt 5:16 “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”

<sup>5</sup> Acts 5:12 “Now many signs and wonders were done among the people by the hands of the apostles. And they were all together in Solomon's Portico.”

<sup>6</sup> See Rom 2:11; Eph 6:9; 1 Pt 1:14-20.

<sup>7</sup> An example of this subconscious superiority feeling is a common expression used by Randy Kilgore in his weekly email titled “Market Place Moments.” In the edition dated Feb 5, 2007, as a response to criticism about his past writings he states: “It seems particularly paradoxical that the citizens who most vociferously criticize what they see as my pro-America bent would come from the country twice rescued by the **sacrifice of thousands and thousands of the best, the brightest and the brave.**” (Bold mine) The qualities he praises need to be qualified with “of us” (i.e. the best of us), if indeed he desires to praise the soldiers of the USA military. The way he wrote it implies that they’re the best and brightest of humankind!!

<sup>8</sup> Social dynamic in which “white people” move out of a neighborhood when people different from them move in.

The presence of Christians in a city, whether nationals or recent immigrants, both documented or undocumented, can be like salt and light,<sup>9</sup> but to optimize this effect, they need to be involved in the community. The great restrictions applied to undocumented immigrants bar their free and open participation in social and civil organizations, as well as in political decisions, among others. The separation among Christians caused by discrimination towards immigrants in general and especially against undocumented immigrants steals the possibility of unity within the body of Christ and decreases the power of the Church's witness of the Gospel message.

We are for the city in that we don't see it as evil and incorrigible, but as a redeemable place, a place that needs intercession, action, and cooperation. As God loves the city, so we must love it with its blessings and challenges. As Abraham's offspring, we follow his example towards the city: "in hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations; as he had been told, 'so shall your descendants be'" (Rom 4:18). Though city life defies our stand of hope in the Lord, we hope even against hope that through this city we shall father many nations, we shall have many sons from many nations, we shall reach the many nations present here with the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, preaching and living out in the power of healing and deliverance.

However, we must not become of the city, limited by its own sin and narrow views. As Christians we must go beyond, extrapolate, live prophetically, see the supernatural while living and breathing in the material realm. We must have vision as the eagles, and soar above what seems unsurpassable, even when history reveals many years of reality unchanged. We must not derive our identity as one of this place for as soon as

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<sup>9</sup> Mt 5:13-14 "You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trodden under foot by men. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid."

we do we lose our prophetic voice and instead of being empowered to point out the discrepancies of Christian discourse and Christian living we fall into the same patterns that bring about the negative results we now see present in our city. As soon as we place our identity in our country (ex.. I'm American; I'm Brazilian) and make that the defining characteristic of our being, above being a Christian and above being a child of God, then there is a new idol we are worshiping: our country. When Christians place their trust in and derive their identity from Christ, then we recover our prophetic voice to call out sin and preach deliverance and forgiveness by the cross of Jesus Christ.

Again, the concept of incarnation does not mean taking on the identity of the city (or the nation) for the thing we are supposed to incarnate is not the spirit of the city (or the nation) but the message of the gospel. As we live out the gospel message our identity must still remain as citizens of the coming city, the New Jerusalem. If that is the case, we will live and act with our worldview based on the fact that we are pilgrims in this city, and pilgrims also in this earth for that matter, heavenly sojourners<sup>10</sup> seeking to establish the rule and reign of our King who reigns in the eternal city. The Kingdom of God must take precedence in the minds and hearts of Christians if we are to deal with the issue of immigration biblically.

### Nativism

Americans are currently dealing with a renewed manifestation of racism called “nativism.” The term, as defined by Catholic priests “assumes that there is just one image

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<sup>10</sup> Ps 39:12 “Hear my prayer, O Lord, and give ear to my cry; hold not thy peace at my tears! For I am thy passing guest, a sojourner, like all my fathers.” and Ps 119:19 “I am a sojourner on earth; hide not thy commandments from me!”



of a “real American” and that immigrants either cannot live up to it or willfully refuse to do so.”<sup>11</sup> But it goes beyond that. Alexander Zaitchik wrote a very informative article on this subject in which he states “in the words of Family Research Council’s Tony Perkins, what’s at stake is not so much guarding America’s security as protecting its ‘cultural fabric.’”<sup>12</sup> Another manifestation of this feeling in discourse comes from Gary Bauer, president of American Values<sup>13</sup> who wrote, in June of 2006,

an op-ed for *USA Today* that decried the failure of Latino immigrants to integrate into American society. “Hyphenated Americans put other countries and affiliations first, and they drive a wedge into the heart of ‘one nation’ ... Bauer also lifted a lid on the motivations of many anti-immigration voices on the Christian Right - motivations more commonly cloaked in the rhetoric of law and order. Bauer admits as much, calling culture the “unmentioned undercurrent” in the immigration debate.<sup>14</sup>

Zaitchik’s article informs the reader about the historicity of this mindset:

Nativism has been a recurring obsession among religious Americans since the colonial era. As they assume battle positions in the 21st-century immigration debate, today’s hard-line crusaders echo mid-19th century Know-Nothings who decried ‘ignorant and depraved foreigners’ from Italy and Ireland. Ditto 20th-century nativists like FDR’s Assistant Secretary of State, Breckinridge Long, who thought Jewish and Slavic immigrants were “entirely unfit to become citizens of this country. ... They are lawless, scheming, [and] defiant.”<sup>15</sup>

The article clarifies what these statements refer to when talking about “culture”:

Thomas Fleming, president of the Christian-flavored Rockford Institute and, like Buchanan, a Catholic, says ‘culture’ sits at the heart of his anti-immigration position... Writing in the Rockford Institute magazine

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<sup>11</sup> “*Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: Unity in Diversity*,” <http://www.usccb.org/mrs/unity.shtml#church> (accessed February 8, 2007).

<sup>12</sup> Alexander Zaitchik, “‘Christian’ Nativism,” *Intelligence Report*, Winter 2006, 62.

<sup>13</sup> American Values defines itself as a non-profit educational organization founded by Gary Bauer after the 2000 presidential campaign. It explains and defines its mission as follows: “The assaults on the principles we hold dear – both from within our country and from abroad – are getting more intense and persistent everyday. That is why American Values exists; to combat these assaults and work tirelessly on behalf of the many Americans who yearn for a free and responsible America.” [www.ouramericanvalues.org](http://www.ouramericanvalues.org) Internet, accessed March 19, 2007.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 63.

*Chronicles: A Magazine of American Culture*, Fleming was plainer about what he means when he says “culture,” admitting, “Whatever we may say in public, most of us do not much like Mexicans, whom we regard as too irrational, too violent, too passionate.”<sup>16</sup>

Zaitchik’s contribution continues in the Winter 2007 edition of *Intelligence Report*. In the article titled “Hawking Racism” he summarizes the ideas of the latest book by Patrick J. Buchanan:

... the book reflects racial views that have now veered to the extreme. White America is changing color, Buchanan argues – “one of the greatest tragedies in human history.” ... America, despite what its founders wrote, was a nation formed not on the basis of creed but rather a homogenous ethnic culture. To put it plainly, *State of Emergency* is a white nationalist tract. The thesis is that America must retain a white majority to survive as a nation. It is rooted in a blood-and-soil nationalism that is more blood than soil. The echoes of Nazi ideology are clear and chilling ... “This idea of America as a creedal nation bound together not by “blood or birth or soil” but by “ideals” that must be taught and learned ... is demonstrably false,” Buchanan writes in the book. Simply put, America is not a nation of ideas. It is a nation of people - white people.<sup>17</sup>

When I first started my research for this project, I picked up every magazine and book I could put my hands on, and I would engage in conversation on the subject with as many as I could, more to listen than to speak. Looking back I can see how unprepared I was to find out what this subject is actually revealing about this country. Now, with sadness I see that the Church is obviously not exempt from the reach of racism and prejudice. The Church is about to have yet another defining issue that might cause more splits.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Alexander Zaitchik, “Hawking Racism”, *Intelligence Report*, Winter 2007. Southern Poverty Law Center. <http://www.splcenter.org/intel/intelreport/article.jsp?aid=718> (accessed February 8, 2007).

On a larger scale than only the city, American Christians (exceptions allowed) have become of the country! The Priests that wrote the Catholic's church statement on immigration applied this truth to the Church:

A kind of nativism appears in the Church itself when established members insist that there is just one way to worship, one set of familiar hymns, one small handful of familiar devotions, one way to organize a parish community, one language for all - and that immigrants must adapt to that way of doing things. In doing so, such nativists forget not only that their ancestors spoke different languages and worshiped in different ways not long ago, but that their devotions and familiar saints, even their patterns of church organization, sprang from encounters between differing traditions within the Church.<sup>18</sup>

### Who is First?

Jesus' well-known words in Matthew 6:33 "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well" are as powerful and as hard to follow today as they were when He first uttered them. Humans tend to seek their own interests first, and leave God's kingdom for last.

In the context of these considerations about the church's ministry to undocumented immigrants in the USA, particularly in the Greater Boston area, and in view of the prevalence of nativism in the thought process of American Christians, it is necessary for us to renew our minds, and fight nativism in order for us not to be of the city. The most basic way to fight our human tendencies for protection of our turf, is to turn back to the elementary doctrine of Christ<sup>19</sup> and daily decide who takes the throne in my life, who is first in my life. This is a topic that requires a decision by every Christian in the USA and everywhere: who is first in my heart and life? Is God first or country

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<sup>18</sup> "Welcoming the Stranger Among Us."

<sup>19</sup> Heb 6: 1-2.

first? Are the laws of the land first or the Bible first? Who is the primary source of authority for my Christian daily living and Christian ministry?

A pastor from Lexington, MA, defined his own perspective on this, “we’re Americans first and everything else second.”<sup>20</sup> In a recent global poll by the Pew Research Center in which participants were asked to respond to the question: “What do you consider yourself first?” with 2 possible answers: a) a citizen of your country; and, b) a Muslim / Christian, the results in the USA showed that “American adults are closely split between those who see themselves as Christians first (42%) and those who see themselves as Americans first (48%); an additional 7% say they see themselves as both equally.”<sup>21</sup> These numbers reflect the split that is visible today in the church of the USA: some defend their country above God and His Word (maybe even using some self-serving interpretation of the Word), and others have committed their loyalty to God above their loyalty to their country. In no form will I ever say that a citizen of any country should despise his citizenship, because it is God who determines who should be born where. It is also God who determines where each person shall live.<sup>22</sup> However, Christians owe it to their God to submit to His sovereignty over His earth.<sup>23</sup> The Lord is the owner of the Earth and the Creator, and rightful governor of the people who live in it.

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<sup>20</sup> “Discussion Panel: Immigration and the Church.” (Discussion Panel held at Congress 2007, Boston, MA, February 2, 2007. Recorded by Fleetwood OnSite Conference Recording [www.fleetwood.com/onsite/congress](http://www.fleetwood.com/onsite/congress)), CD 1 of 2, Track 5.

<sup>21</sup> Pew Research Center, “42% - Christians First, Americans Second” Pew Research Center The Databank <http://pewresearch.org/databank/dailynumber/?NumberID=136>; (accessed February 7, 2007). The methodology used for this survey in the USA, as described by the Pew Research Center was as follows: Sample design: Probability; Mode: Telephone adults 18 plus; Languages: English; Fieldwork dates: May 2-14, 2006; Sample size: 1001; Margin of Error: 3%; Representative: Telephone households in continental U.S. (according to <http://pewglobal.org/reports/display.php?PageID=840>).

<sup>22</sup> Acts 17:26 “And he made from one every nation of men to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their habitation” (RSV) and also a different translation: “From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live.” (NIV)

<sup>23</sup> Ps 24:1 “The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein.”

We are to fear Him for he sees all we do.<sup>24</sup> He has made humanity his stewards on Earth.<sup>25</sup>

According to Besançon-Spencer's explanation of Luke 9:58-62,

... if you claim to be a Christian, you need to obey Christ, and, if you do, you can never fully identify with any human family or home. Jesus has no turf. (...) Jesus' message then and now, is: you cannot simply marvel at God's majesty, as God takes care of you; you also need to receive your core security in God, by becoming a citizen of God's reign and by promoting God's desire in your life. If we follow Jesus "wherever he may go," we will find ourselves in the country between countries.<sup>26</sup>

### God's Image

In the Creation narrative, God clearly sets Mankind apart from the rest of His creatures, as a special kind of Creation because He molded, shaped and breathed in the Breath of Life, making him a living being. God's description of mankind's qualitative difference with all other beings is found in Gn 1: 26-27:

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

Within every human being lies the Image of God, though marred by sin in this fallen world, nevertheless it is a mark of the Creator. Before God, human worth is based in nothing more than the fact that we are humans. Jesus died for us while we were still in

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<sup>24</sup> Ps 33:13 "The Lord looks from heaven; He sees all the sons of men." and Prv 15:3 "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good."

<sup>25</sup> Ps 115:16 "The heavens are the Lord's heavens, but the earth he has given to the sons of men." See also Mt 24:44-51, especially verse 45: "'Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his master has set over his household, to give them their food at the proper time?'"

<sup>26</sup> Aída Besançon Spencer and William David Spencer, *The Global God: Multicultural Evangelical Views of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: BridgePoint Books, 1998), 93.

our sins and transgressions.<sup>27</sup> It is a common Christian understanding that, according to Paul's writings in the Bible, we are not saved by our works, but by grace through faith.<sup>28</sup> This demonstrates that all people are hopelessly in the same category: totally dependent on God for mercy and salvation. Before God, the fact that one person was born in one place and another somewhere else, does not make one inherently more or less important or valuable than the other. How are we Christians truthful in the expression of our discipleship to Jesus Christ, following his commands and manifesting his *shalom* if we treat others with partiality or discrimination?<sup>29</sup>

In ministry we deal with fallen mankind and the results of sin throughout our life. Individual sin and institutional sin need to be addressed. In the immigration discussion, much attention is given to what is considered by some as an individual sin on the part of the undocumented immigrants, because they are not following the law. Institutional sin however, has remained undealt with for too long on this issue. God has blessed the USA, and as ambassadors of God we are called upon to give that which we have received. This country has received grace – it should share it. Christians born in the USA have received opportunity for financial prosperity (although many have fallen in the habit of spending above their income level, thus living in debt), they should share it. That which is true of our spiritual lives should be applied to our material lives as well. We receive salvation – we should share it with others. We receive forgiveness from God – we should extend it to others. We receive a decent treatment from the government – in Christian ministry we should also make this treatment available to others – regardless of their legal status. The

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<sup>27</sup> Rom 5:8 “But God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.”

<sup>28</sup> Eph 2:8 “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God.”

<sup>29</sup> See Jas 2:1-7, particularly verse 4: “have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?”

Church is not a law enforcement agency, though it should be a law abiding organization as long as said laws do not contradict God's laws. The Word of God exhorts us in Matthew 10:7-8 to give freely that which we have received freely "As you go, proclaim the good news, 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment." And in Luke 12:48b the responsibility is clearly on us about how we manage what we have received from God: "From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded."

#### God Requires that His People Protect the Alien (Stranger, Sojourner, Exiled, Foreigner)

God commanded the Israelites to extend justice to foreigners, exactly because they once were foreigners!<sup>30</sup> When giving these directives, God was speaking to a generation that had never lived outside of Egypt. For all they had experienced, Egypt was their homeland. It was only the promise of a land of their own, provided by God that kept alive in their memories the fact that they did not belong there, much like it should be with Christians in the USA. Although born in the USA, our true home is not here, but in Heaven, and this should remain very present in our minds: we do not belong here either! Speaking to the Israelites that had left Egypt, God says "You shall not oppress a stranger; you know the heart of a stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Ex 23:9). To this the Israelites (observe the parallel with Americans) could have answered: "what

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<sup>30</sup> Ex 22:21 "You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt."

do you mean, God? I was never a stranger. I don't know (and I'm not interested in) what strangers feel like in their hearts! I was born here. My parents came here, but they first entered this land legally because Pharaoh allowed them to." Yet God counted them as strangers in that land! And He counts us Christians as strangers in any country as well, given that our loyalty, our citizenship, is in Heaven.<sup>31</sup> In the New Testament, in Peter's first epistle, he addresses his readers as aliens:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and to an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. 1 Pt 1:3-5

By placing the readers' inheritance in heaven, Peter indicates that their ultimate place of residence is not earth. In the next chapter, Peter is more direct and makes sure the readers understand their legal status on earth: they are aliens and because of that, they are expected to live life differently while on earth, awaiting for their heavenly inheritance.

Beloved, I beseech you as aliens and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh that wage war against your soul. 1 Pt 2:11

Back to the Biblical narrative of Israel's exodus from Egypt, the new Pharaoh, who did not know Joseph (and did not care to get informed about the past history which was certainly registered in the annals of the kingdom), observed the "invasion" was getting out of control. His proposed "solution" for the threat parallels contemporary discourse in the USA, among Christians and non-Christians alike:

And he said to his people, "Behold, the people of Israel are too many and too mighty for us. Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and, if

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<sup>31</sup> Phil 3:20 "But our commonwealth is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ"



war befall us, they join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land.” Therefore they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with heavy burdens; and they built for Pharaoh store-cities, Pithom and Ra-am’ses. But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and the more they spread abroad. And the Egyptians were in dread of the people of Israel. So they made the people of Israel serve with rigor, and made their lives bitter with hard service, in mortar and brick, and in all kinds of work in the field; in all their work they made them serve with rigor. Ex 1:10-14

What was God’s response? He delivered the nation of Israel from oppression with many signs and wonders to show to Pharaoh that the earth is the Lord’s.<sup>32</sup> Now this may be exactly what some USA-born old-time immigrant descendants are thinking is the solution to the current “threat” that they feel about losing control (or the culture, or the white majority) of the USA. Granted, God’s action in Israel’s story was planned by Him and was part of His eternal plan of salvation, to bring Christ into the earth, but it requires a special kind of mindset to combine the reading of the Bible willing to be transformed by it while at the same time ignoring the overwhelmingly high priority that God gives to the protection of these three “categories” of people: the orphan, the widow, and the foreigner. Moreover, at the Exodus, God allowed for foreigners of other nations to mix in with the Israelites, and made sure they were protected by the laws of the nation, based on the fact that He was their Lord.<sup>33</sup>

What shall we say of the Law that the Lord commanded to leave some of the harvest for the foreigners? Would it not be parallel to providing healthcare and food stamps to impoverished aliens?

And when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field to its very border, nor shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest;

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<sup>32</sup> Ex 9:29 “Moses said to him, As soon as I have gone out of the city, I will stretch out my hands to the Lord; the thunder will cease, and there will be no more hail, that you may know that the earth is the Lord’s.”

<sup>33</sup> Ex 12:38, and Lv 24:22 “You shall have one law for the sojourner and for the native; for I am the Lord your God.”

you shall leave them for the poor and for the stranger: I am the LORD  
your God. Lv 23:22

It was by the use of this provision for the alien that Ruth, a host-country citizen (the country of Moab received Elimelech's family, from Bethlehem of Judah, who immigrated because of a famine),<sup>34</sup> turned alien in Israel was able to provide for herself (a foreigner) and her mother-in-law (a widow) and eventually be inserted into the lineage of Jesus Christ, our Savior.

### The Son of God, the Foreigner

Jesus started his life on earth while his mother and earthly father were on a trip enforced by a colonizing superpower. The kind of inhospitable climate in the city is much like what today's immigrants face in the USA. "There is no place for you." So Mary had a baby without access to the healthcare available at that time. Soon, baby Jesus was taken to Egypt, running away from violence against babies (against life) in his native country. Egypt once again became the place where Israelites found refuge. Would USA immigration laws respond to Jesus' parents' plea for refuge with a visa or with prison?<sup>35</sup>

Jesus identifies with the human race at the level of the most basic needs in Matthew 25:31-46. In this text he describes Judgment, the separation of the sheep from the goats. When He speaks to those on his right hand and invites them to inherit the kingdom, He gives 6 examples of how they ministered to Him, while they were serving "the least of these who are members of my family."

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<sup>34</sup> Ru 1:1-2

<sup>35</sup> Lindy Scott, "Mi Casa es Tu Casa: A Biblical Perspective on the Current Immigration Situation", Paper (Wheaton, IL: Wheaton College).

The list below summarizes it:

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|---------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. I was hungry     | You gave me food               |
| 2. I was thirsty    | You gave me something to drink |
| 3. I was a stranger | You welcomed me                |
| 4. I was naked      | You gave me clothing           |
| 5. I was sick       | You took care of me            |
| 6. I was in prison  | You visited me                 |

So many Christians cry out to God asking Him to somehow use them. Would they be open to accept Jesus' answer to them if it sounded like "welcome the immigrants?" Or for that matter, "serve the poorest in your city" or "make time to schedule a visit to someone in prison?" Are we as Christians really wanting to hear Jesus' voice if it goes against our comfort zone and defies what we take for unchangeable in the way of culture and values?

### What Can Happen if the Immigrant Becomes *Like One of Us*

One of the factors challenging American Christians in regards to relationship with immigrants is the notable differences between the two groups. The argument goes that if immigrants assimilated the American culture without resistance things would go smoothly and without conflict. But the Bible tells us of the results of the decision of a set of immigrants to completely buy into the host country's culture.

Genesis 19 tells us about God's dealing with a very wicked complex of cities – Sodom, Gomorrah, and the cities of the Plain (v. 25). Lot had been living in the city of

Sodom but not making an effective difference in the city. Not even ten people were found to be righteous in the city that he lived! Lot, his wife and two daughters would have counted for 4 righteous people, if they were such, and if Lot had been able to influence his two sons-in-law there could have been two more, totaling six. Could not have six righteous people converted another six? Or even other four? There was no incarnation of the ways of God from the part of Lot, and there was no intimacy with God – no intercession. He and his family became one of them.

God appeared to Abraham to forewarn him of the impending destruction and give him the opportunity to intercede in favor of the cities, which he did. Here again there is an intersection between presence and prayer. Laurie Green says: “Urban prayer, like Abraham’s, must be informed, compassionate and full of hope.”<sup>36</sup> Lot’s presence was ineffective and his intercession power null for he took on the ways of the Sodomites, trying to appease their fiery lust by offering them his own two virgin daughters! He was not a powerful presence that brings change, but he was being changed himself into “one of them.” The same happened with his wife, who could not follow the instruction not to look back, and with his daughters, who devised a plan to impregnate themselves by their father’s seed. Wickedness took hold of Lot’s family, instead of him making a difference in the spiritual make-up of the city where he lived. Lot, the immigrant, had the opportunity to incarnate God’s holiness in Sodom, but he identified himself with that city.

In the same way, Christian immigrants must be careful so that they do not get so involved with the dominant culture and ways that identify themselves as “one of them”

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<sup>36</sup> Laurie Green, *Urban Ministry and the Kingdom of God* (Great Britain: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2003), 124.

and thus lose their authority to confront injustice and sin in the systems and structures of the city or nation. American Christians, on the other hand, need to continuously ask God to search their hearts and see if there are any evil ways in it,<sup>37</sup> regarding their stand on immigration. Immigrants are not to become like Americans. They might become lawful citizens one day, but “I carry my roots with me all the time rolled up I use them as my pillow.”<sup>38</sup>

### Being with the City

A position of being with the city is more holistic. By joining efforts and dedicating our gifts to the city – maybe in the form of opening a business in the city, or manifested as choosing to be patrons of local businesses, or yet becoming involved in city committee decisions – we live and work with the city to bring God’s redemption to it. Being with the city encompasses being in it, experiencing its sufferings, its challenges and the results of its sinful choices, yet remaining there as a light in the darkness, as well as involving us in the intercession and actions that produce change - being for the city.

The presence of a godly people is absolutely essential to the survival of the city. Demonic and unjust influence might appear to be overwhelming in the city, but the presence of the people of God will not allow the city to collapse because of the evil in it. Jesus compares Christians to salt. Their presence in the city both gives taste and preserves from decomposition. Christians are also compared to the light – they illuminate

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<sup>37</sup> Ps 139:23-24 “Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!”

<sup>38</sup> Francisco Alarcón, “Roots/Raíces,” in *Laughing Tomatoes and Other Spring Poems / Jitomates risueños y otros poemas de primavera* (San Francisco, CA: Children’s BookPress, 1997, Bilingual edition, 2005), 5.

everything that happens in the city. By their lifestyle they make visible the lies of city life and of systems and of the principalities that try to dominate the city for their own benefit. Living in such a way, demonstrating to the world the wholeness and blessing of Christian life, they become signs of judgment (oaks of righteousness – Is 61) of how life in the city can be when it is submitted to the lordship of Christ in communion with God and following the virtue of love of neighbor. Based on our citizenship in heaven we are to be citizens on earth making the New Jerusalem be reflected on earth by the church (Rv 21:1-14).

Statistically, Christianity in Boston would be in sharp decline were it not for the presence of ethnic churches, many of them filled with undocumented immigrants. Just as DeSilva<sup>39</sup> mentioned that immigrants are vital for the economic growth of Massachusetts, Hall has collected data that shows the enormous contribution that immigrants have had in the Boston area to the growth of Christianity.<sup>40</sup> If we identify ourselves with the Kingdom of God we rejoice in this fact. If we identify ourselves with the Nation first, we cannot pray enough to see “all these immigrants pack and go back to where they belong.” Such discourse from American Christians demonstrates the need for a deeper assessment of where they have placed their loyalties.

However, the presence in the city may or may not mean that a certain individual or family must remain in that place for the long term. Their calling for presence and influence there may be temporary. The Bible shows God often reminding people of his mandate to spread and populate the earth, spreading His dominion. Scriptures shows God

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<sup>39</sup> Ray DeSilva, “Contributions of the Immigrant Workforce”, in *Giving Voice to a Nascent Community: Exploring Brazilian Immigration to the USA through Research and Practice - Working Papers on Latin America no. 04/05*, ed. Clémence Jouët-Pastré, Megwen Loveless, and Leticia Braga (2003): 19.

<sup>40</sup> Douglas Hall, *Christianity in Boston* (Boston, MA: Emmanuel Gospel Center, 1993), G-1G-10.

calling people out of the city to do his will. We see Abraham called out of Ur of the Chaldeans and, in the New Testament, the newly formed church spreading out to the surrounding areas because of persecution. Jesus himself went from town to town in His ministry, as did Paul. There is a place for people to stay in a city and make a lifelong impact in it, and there is a place for people to come to a city for a season and then leave to another city, another country, or to a rural area, to continue propagating the Gospel of Christ. Whether in an urban setting or a suburban/rural area, the Christian, the true disciple of Jesus will always live out His calling to be a priest, a citizen of a holy nation, a maker of peace, and an intercessor.

#### *The Church works with the city*

Presence, the seeking of peace and prayer must always be together. When one or more of these elements are absent in the dynamic of Church existence, a gap in the wholeness of the practice of the Gospel might be created, causing deviations of the whole Gospel message, even to the extent of creating conditions for congregations to turn into cults. J. Alfred Smith, Sr. calls attention to the fact that the Black Church can't seem to want to face the issue of why so many black people got involved in the Jim Jones' cult and deal with it (grief and responsibility), and in doing so he exposes a painful reality of Christian churches, namely that either the minister or else the congregation, desires to deal and be informed only of "spiritual" things, the life after death, but not get involved in bringing heaven to earth. This vacuum opens up room for more situations like Peoples Temple to come about again. Where there is a lack of social involvement on the part of

the Church, other groups, sects, cults or legitimate civil and governmental institutions will have a gap to fill.<sup>41</sup>

The church is not merely a place or a congregation that tries to pull people in, get them to sign their names on the dotted line and become members of something, much like a club. It is a community of disciples of Jesus that meets in a place (be it in a building or under a tree as in some places), and extends its reach and influence to the community, through worship of the true God, proclamation of the truth, and serving the needs of the Body and much beyond that, even of those who might never become part of it. Church is also a gathering of people that hunger for God, and invite others in the same situation to come and be filled with the Word and worship and fellowship (community).

The Israelites lived an extraordinary experience of a mobile city, centered on the presence of God. By obeying His marching or stopping orders, they were protected, fed, clothed, housed, guided and kept alive. Sin, however, manifested itself in many ways throughout the camp and it was sin that eventually drove God's presence away from the Temple, once that community had been established as a non-mobile city. Nowadays, the Church is called to bring redemption, proclaiming that the only way of bridging the gap of sin is through the sacrificial atonement of Jesus at Calvary. Once redemption is seeded in a city, it takes root, grows and spreads, and once again the blessings resulting from obedience come about and God's presence is manifested in protection, food, clothing, housing, guidance and life in the city.

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<sup>41</sup> J. Alfred Smith, "Breaking the Silence: Reflections of a Black Pastor," in *Peoples Temple and Black Religion in America*, ed. Rebecca Moore, Anthony B. Pinn, and Mary Sawyer (Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004), 150-152.



The gift of presence includes the expression of fellowship among the believers – *koinonia*. The book of Phillipians shows five levels of expression of *koinonia*:

A. Gospel Koinonia – Phil 1:5

B. Grace Koinonia – Phil 1:7

C. Spirit Koinonia – Phil 2:1

D. Suffering Koinonia – Phil 3:10

E. Economic Koinonia – Phil 4:14-15<sup>42</sup>

Through the fellowship of the church (and churches) the city can clearly see God's love expressed in real ways and this communicates the gospel much better than many words ever could, for the Church is in the city!

### **A Theology of Peace: The City and Ministry**

Seeking the peace of the city, when understood in the light of Jeremiah 29:4-13, has to do with being there, whether by circumstance or by calling. This is demonstrated in the text by the dual possibility of interpretation of the Hebrew word “*gâlâh*,” translated to English by expressions such as “sent you into exile” (NASU) or “I have caused you to be carried away captive” (ASV). *Gâlâh*, initially meaning “exile,” has also a double meaning: (a) “punishment,” because of the justice of God; and (b) “to be sent” as an

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<sup>42</sup> Eldin Villafañe, D.Min. Residency lecture in the course “Seek the Peace of the City: Theology and Ethics for Urban Ministry” (lecture, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Boston, MA, June 10, 2005).

ambassador of God. By choosing to use this word, Jeremiah might have wanted to express a dual meaning: Israel was being punished for all their sins (circumstance), but also the people were sent to Babylon because they were needed there to be “salt and light” (calling).<sup>43</sup> This seems to be the case with many immigrants to the USA as well.

If we consider the primitive root of the word “*gâlâh*” we find the meaning to be “to denude (especially in a disgraceful sense)”<sup>44</sup> which is a stark representation of what happens to a great number of immigrants to the USA. Many come here and experience the life of exile – (captives being usually stripped) – by being stripped of their familiar surroundings, friends, family, identity, culture, language, and dignity. When immigrants come undocumented, and also not able to speak English, they immediately create a class of their own, where, in order to survive, work must be found, performed and paid for, no matter what the cost. Part of the cost is that many times they leave behind their former profession and lifestyle to engage in lower skilled work and submit themselves to getting paid whatever the employer decides their work is worth (sometimes the agreement is for one amount and when payment time comes, the employer pays less). Thus, we can find lawyers, accountants and nurses working as house cleaners, shoe shiners and gas pump operators, being paid a fraction of what a USA born person would be paid. Many times their “immigration project” turns out like the Brazilian saying that goes: “you get out of the fryer to fall into the fire.” The punishment side is evident, because of the corruption and evil systems that their countries of origin feed and sustain, the citizens of those countries are made to pay a high cost for moving out of their native land and trying to adapt to a different reality somewhere else.

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<sup>43</sup> Robert Linthicum, *Transforming Power: Biblical Strategies for Making a Difference in Your Community* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 72-73.

<sup>44</sup> Strong’s Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries

In addition to this perspective, they are also sent to the USA, a country that desperately needs a true living witness of the gospel. While some missionaries are sent from the USA to distant parts of the world, many more are sent here by God from developing countries to revitalize Christianity in this place. Boston is a city representative of this reality, in that the thriving churches, alive and multiplying, are mostly ethnic and recently planted, versus the traditional, mainline Euro-American churches.

Another concept that requires the understanding of its many nuances of meaning is the Hebrew word “*shalom*,” and its Greek equivalent “*eirene*.” By looking at the many passages where *shalom* and *eirene* are used, it is possible to identify the various meanings they can depict, such as: completeness, wholeness, totality, health, integrity, soundness, welfare, security, reconciliation, prosperity, harmony, peace, justice, salvation, liberation, and deliverance. Coupled with these meanings by themselves, we can encompass the many areas of life where these concepts are applied: material (economic), physical (biological), personal, interpersonal, communal/political, moral, spiritual, and psychological. And, by looking at the uses of these terms in Scriptures in general, we gather that the most prominent theological meanings are: welfare, prosperity, harmony, justice, salvation. Linthicum adds that,

*shalom* is an exceedingly rich concept, a comprehensive word dealing with and covering all the relationships of daily life, expressing the ideal state of life in Israel and, indeed, the entire world. The concept of *shalom* essentially encompasses what the Israelites saw as being foundational to life: being in community with each other.<sup>45</sup>

We must understand that the concept of “seeking the peace” goes far beyond a simplistic and common understanding of peace. Seeking the peace must not be confused

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<sup>45</sup> Linthicum, *Transforming Power*, 36.

with “maintaining” the peace, as one would if not inclined to confront sin and evil. Sometimes, in order to seek the peace of the city, the church must “break” the peace, *per se*, that is, the status quo, and confront the evil systems that hinder the development of the city into a place of “*shalom*.” It is only in Christ and through Him that individuals and cities can have peace (Lk 1:79), and it is He who gives us peace (Jn 20:19, 21, 26). We are called to journey our Christian walk having the gospel of peace as the basis (Eph 6:15). Once the church walks in His peace, experimenting welfare, prosperity, harmony, justice, and the salvation that comes through Christ, even as expressed in the Body, then there is no stopping the Bride of Christ from proclaiming, living out, and sharing the peace of God to all around her, for the good news of peace is the message of God (Acts 10:36), an instrument of unity (Eph 4:3), the work of the Spirit (Gal 5:22), and we must promote it (Heb 12:14).

## Love

“Love is an act of the will to seek the good of the other. It is a disposition or intention to apply the standard of God’s righteousness to all social relationships.”<sup>46</sup>

1 John 4:8 is a well-known verse “He who does not love does not know God; for God is love.” Now, if we are God’s children, we are to live according to His family’s rules and to live in such a way that honors His character. Considering some key Scriptures about love, we find:

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<sup>46</sup> Eldin Villafañe, D.Min. Residency lecture in the course “The Church in the City: Confronting Issues in Contemporary Urban Society” (lecture, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Boston, MA, June 8, 2006).

**Lv 19:34 – Love the stranger**

The stranger who sojourns with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.

**Dt 10:18-19 – God loves the sojourner / We must love the sojourner**

He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing. Love the sojourner therefore; for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt.

**Jn 13:34 – Love one another** (also Jn 13:35; 15:12; 15:17)

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another.

**Rom 13:8 – Love one another**

Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law.

**Rom 13:10 – Loving the neighbor fulfills the law**

Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.

**Lev 19:18 – Love you neighbor**

You shall not take vengeance or bear any grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.

**Lk 10:27 – Love God and love your neighbor**

And he answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself."

**Gal 5:14 – Love your neighbor**

For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

**Mt 5:43-45 – Love your enemies**

You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy." But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

**1 Jn 4:20 – Love for God is proven by loving people**

If any one says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen.

**Eph 5:1-2 – Walking in love = offering and sacrifice**

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

1 Thes. 3:12 – **God is the one who increases our love for all men**

And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all men, as we do to you.

On the subject of love, God's Word leaves absolutely no room for us to escape its power and its directive for us to love as He has loved us. Because God is love, and because God is our God, and because we obey His commandments, we are to love all people, including immigrants, both documented and undocumented. If the immigrants are Christians, they fall into the "one another" category (Jn 13:34 and Rom 13:8), then you are commanded by God to love the immigrants. If you consider immigrants your neighbors (Gal 5:14, see also Lk 10:29-37),<sup>47</sup> you are commanded by God to love the immigrants. If you consider them your enemies, then you are commanded by God to love the immigrants!! Jesus loved us when we were God's enemies; He chose to reconcile us to Himself by the death of His Son,<sup>48</sup> and He gave us to the ministry of reconciliation<sup>49</sup> as well. All immigrants, documented and undocumented, for the simple reasons that we must obey God's commandments and because we are recipients of God's love,<sup>50</sup> are to be loved by the Church, that is you and I. "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments" 1 Jn 5:2; and, 2 Jn 1:6 "And this is love, that we follow his commandments; this is the commandment, as you have heard from the beginning, that you follow love."

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<sup>47</sup> Lk 10:29-37 responds to the question that initiated Jesus' parable: But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

<sup>48</sup> Rom 5:10 "For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life."

<sup>49</sup> 2 Cor 5:18 "All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation"

<sup>50</sup> 1 Jn 4:19 "We love, because he first loved us."

## Justice

“Justice is getting what one is due or one’s right. It can be understood as fidelity (faithfulness) to the demands of a relationship.”<sup>51</sup> Justice is part of the high moral call from God to His children. Whenever we talk about justice, people’s first understanding, depending upon the context, might be one of these: revenge, punishment, compensation (ex. a cash settlement) or “social justice” when we think about the people with less economic power.

The Bible makes it clear that justice is part of God’s character and that He expects His people to extend justice to others. God’s righteousness is the basis for His justice.

### **Ps 89:14 – Justice is at God’s throne’s foundation**

Righteousness and justice are the foundation of thy throne; steadfast love and faithfulness go before thee.

### **Is 30:18 – The Lord is a God of justice**

Therefore the LORD waits to be gracious to you; therefore he exalts himself to show mercy to you. For the LORD is a God of justice; blessed are all those who wait for him.

### **Prv 21:3 – Justice is better than sacrifice**

To do righteousness and justice is more acceptable to the LORD than sacrifice.

### **Is 1:16-20 – We are to seek justice**

Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow. “Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool. If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured by the sword; for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.

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<sup>51</sup> Villafañe, D.Min. Residency lecture in the course “The Church in the City.”

**Jer 22:3 – Do justice. Do no wrong or violence to the alien**

Thus says the LORD: Do justice and righteousness, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor him who has been robbed. And do no wrong or violence to the alien, the fatherless, and the widow, nor shed innocent blood in this place.

**Mi 6:8 – The Lord requires that you do justice**

He has showed you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

**Is 61:10-11 – The Prophet writes about Jesus dressed in righteousness**

I delight greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. For as the soil makes the sprout come up and a garden causes seeds to grow, so the Sovereign Lord will make righteousness and praise spring up before all nations.

**Jb 29:14-17 – Narration of Job dressed in righteousness/justice**

I put on righteousness, and it clothed me; my justice was like a robe and a turban. I was eyes to the blind, and feet to the lame. I was a father to the poor, and I searched out the cause of him whom I did not know. I broke the fangs of the unrighteous, and made him drop his prey from his teeth.

**Eph 6:13-17 – The full armor of God includes the Breastplate of righteousness**

Now, justice can be distributive or retributive. Mott explains these two kinds and gives a biblical example:

... two prominent modes of justice within a social system: distributive justice and retributive (or criminal) justice. The first provides the standard for the distribution of the benefits of the society, the second for the distribution of the penalties (punishment according to one's deserts) ... So in atonement, God's righteousness (*dikaïosyne*) (distributive justice) overcomes God's wrath (retributive justice).<sup>52</sup>

Villafañe explains that there are 3 elements to distributive justice:<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Mott, *Biblical Ethics*, 62.

<sup>53</sup> Villafañe, D.Min. Residency lecture in the course "The Church in the City."



a) Need – this is the equivalent to Mott’s “*principle of redress*, which postulates that inequalities in the conditions necessary to achieve the standard of well-being be corrected to approximate equality.”<sup>54</sup> Here, he who needs more must get more so that all are equally satisfied. In Villafañe’s analogy, if Mother A has children B, C and D, to be just at the dinner table, she must give more food to child B who is an 11-year old, 81 lbs. boy, than to child C who is a 10-year old, 70 lbs girl, and child C must get more than child B, who is a 8 year-old, 50 lbs boy. Distributing all the food equally is not just in this case. He who needs more, must get more to be justly provided for and satisfied.

b) Equality – this element is used in the Bible when God commands to treat aliens the same as citizens. It has to do with the right to receive justice. Before God we all are equal from this perspective, because we are all human. He makes the sun to shine and the rain to pour both on evil and good, righteous and unrighteous.<sup>55</sup> Mott writes “the presence of grace and love in justice universalizes the formal principle of equal treatment of equals, shows a regard for the needs of each person, and creates the obligation to seek the good of each. The well-being and freedom of each other person becomes as valuable to me as my own.” In Villafañe’s analogy, all kids receive food because they are human and children of a loving mother.

c) Merit – Extra benefits come to those who deserve or do their part to get it. In Villafañe’s analogy, for dessert, Mother can put a condition to receive the blessing: “if you have cleaned your room as I have told you to, you will get dessert.” However, dessert is not a basic need nutritionally. 2 Chr 7:14 puts a promise in the conditional: “if

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<sup>54</sup> Mott, *Biblical Ethics*, 67.

<sup>55</sup> Mt 5:44-45 “But I tell you: love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.”

my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.” These blessings are available, but first these conditions must be met.

### Intersection of Love and Justice

Stephen Mott makes the connection between love and justice: “Because it applies equally to all, demands respect for each, and appreciates the needs and capacity for enjoyment of every person, love gives birth to human rights – the fabric of justice.”<sup>56</sup> And, as previously mentioned, he contends that love and justice are not distinct and contrary in Scriptures, but overlapping and complementary. Walter Muelder writes “justice is love rationally distributed,”<sup>57</sup> and Edward Le Roy Long, Jr. states “justice is the function expression of love in its effort to adjudicate competing claims.”<sup>58</sup>

On the issue of illegal immigration, some understand that in order for us as Christians to be just we must give different kinds of treatment to immigrants who entered the USA legally and stayed legal, from those who somehow have fallen into illegality. To start our considerations in this central point of the discussion, we must again be reminded that this challenging situation involves the whole world, not only this country and that we must have this reality present as we think it through in hopes to find the biblical way to do justice and express love. By this I mean that the USA is not an isolated “victim of invasion” because it has become so prosperous. The world is not a dead structure but rather a system of living beings that produce interrelated dynamics of relationship so that

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<sup>56</sup> Mott, *Biblical Ethics*, 64.

<sup>57</sup> Villafañe, D.Min. Residency lecture in the course “The Church in the City.”

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

whatever movement happens in one country, be it in the social, economic, environmental, scientific or political realm, it will certainly affect another, and with inter-generational consequences.

Keeping in mind that before God we all have the same intrinsic value as humans is critical lest we become judgmental and display pharisaic-like attitudes or worse, give way to racism. Given that the Bible clearly commands us to love and do justice, why is the tension present in our hearts when the subject turns to undocumented immigrants? Why are USA Christians more willing to give attention, care and consideration to every other command but to love the foreigner? Why are we classifying “the foreigner” as in “I will love them but only if they’re legal” when the Bible does not? I believe it is partly because we accuse them of openly defying the laws we are so “proud” and careful to uphold. All Christians should be law-abiding citizens<sup>59</sup> and I believe most try to be, but for us there are spiritual laws as well as Civil laws to follow and hopefully, reconcile. Herein lays the problem.

While American Christians are feeling provoked and offended in their patriotism (or nativism), undocumented immigrants are struggling with their illegal situation and the lack of opportunity to change it. There are currently no laws that would legalize a person that has become out of status without a ban of 3-10 years. This would mean that even if an undocumented immigrant was to be sponsored by an employer, in the end of the process, just because he was at one point out of status, he would have to go back to his country and wait between 3 and 10 years before being allowed to step foot in USA soil again. When the USA narrows the visa quotas and denies visas all over the world, and

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<sup>59</sup> Rom 13:1 “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.”

very selectively so, this country is also provoking the international community and causing the very problem it is dealing with. No undocumented immigrant wants to stay in this situation. The vast majority would go to great lengths to be able to be in legal status, with no fear, and with all obligations to the country fulfilled. As it is today, even the most honest undocumented immigrant thinks twice before filing taxes, not because they want to evade it as so many Americans do (and unfortunately Christians do too), but because if they do, they will call attention to themselves, show the government that they are working and risk being deported. The system incites more and more illegality! When an undocumented immigrant depends on being able to drive to make a living and the system does not allow him to drive legally, is he supposed to stop working? The system forces many immigrants to either drive without a license (and risk being deported) or find an illegal (or not totally legal) way of obtaining one which costs hundreds if not thousands of dollars (and risk being deported). This only encourages the illegal market of documents, bribery and other illegal activities that thrive with the impossibility of obtaining genuine documents.

Some might say, “Well, they shouldn’t be here in the first place. And they should not be working anyway, so the driver’s license is not a problem. Why don’t they just go back to their countries, then? That is the way they can escape illegality, nobody is forcing them to stay...” That would be a good question to ask each one of the undocumented immigrants with whom you might come into contact. If you ask it with respect and not contempt, you might be surprised to hear story after story of suffering, lack of opportunity, hopelessness and oppression that would probably break your heart. And if your heart is not broken by human suffering, then God still has a lot of work to do in this

area of your life. The USA is not the best place in the world to live. When someone in Brazil a while ago asked me if the USA was the best, I answered frankly “no, the best place in the world for you to live is wherever God wants you to be.” Nevertheless, the USA still is a good country to live in and it is a land of opportunities. Here people can work hard and receive equitable compensation. In other places, sometimes the hard work does not produce even enough to pay for staple food. If conditions were different in their countries, most undocumented immigrants (or immigrants in general) would gladly return and some would have never left their countries.

What would happen then, if the USA forcefully made every undocumented immigrant leave the country? Have you ever considered that this would be easy to accomplish? Among immigrant communities, if law enforcement officials were determined to arrest every undocumented person they could succeed in a matter of weeks. Stores, night clubs, community festivals, are some of the places that Immigration could simply come and find them. Why do they choose not to? It is not because the USA is so kind and receptive, but because it needs their labor. I judge it informative to our considerations, to look at another modern day “invasion” situation, and the result of this type of expulsion:

When Malaysia expelled 380,000 foreigner labourers in 2005, most of them from impoverished Indonesia, following an amnesty between October 2004 and February 2005, those who did not leave before the deadline were hunted by 300,000 vigilantes recruited and armed by the government and forcibly expelled. The Malaysian government, in the face of mounting international criticism, argued that it was protecting Malaysian jobs and cracking down on illegal immigration. Within months Malaysia faced chronic labour shortages. Plantations, construction sites and factories ground to a halt. Illegal immigrants made up to 10 per cent of the Malaysian workforce and the Malaysian economy relied upon them to do the menial jobs that most Malaysians would not do.

Despite attempts to entice them back, most have been unwilling to return. Of the 380,000 who left, fewer than 40,000 have been willing to come back.<sup>60</sup>

So, the USA needs the immigrants, documented and undocumented, to keep fueling its economy. We have seen that security is of concern but not the focal point of the resistance against immigrants. The situation narrows down to laws that are “so onerous that they actually encourage people to disobey them.”<sup>61</sup>

Our discussion however, needs to be centered not on the “what ifs” but on the true and eternal Word of God that commands us to love and do justice to the alien as Christians and in our Church ministry.

The common argument that the fact that someone is continuously breaking the law makes them a sinner has to be considered. And by exposing my next consideration I am in no way trying to use the system where one’s sin is called to justify another’s. My objective indeed is to challenge the Church’s double standard when dealing with sin. For the ministry of the church to be just, it must treat all sins with the same severity. For example, which of these is an act of breaking the law of the land?

- a) Driving over the speed limit
- b) Drunk driving
- c) Evading taxes
- d) Embezzlement (more and more happening in churches)
- e) Beating one’s wife to death (happens in Christian circles)

All of the above! Moreover, which of these is an act of breaking God’s law?

- a) Abortion

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<sup>60</sup> Juss, *International Migration*, 6.

<sup>61</sup> Rhodes, *Where the Nations Meet*, 125.

- b) Gay marriage (even the church is divided on this)
- c) Slander
- d) Gluttony
- e) Dishonoring parents
- f) Not resting one day per week (Sabbath)

All of the above! Yet, none of these is “illegal!” Furthermore, is it not true that slavery was once lawful (or legal) in the USA? I am proposing, therefore that sin and illegality are not synonymous. Sometimes one thing is both sinful and illegal. At other times they differ. Why would we in our own righteousness<sup>62</sup> seek to develop a sliding scale to classify which sins we tolerate in church and which we do not? To do this is to use two weights and two measures, both of which the Lord abhors.<sup>63</sup> But I have not heard much of a confrontation in Christian circles about driving over the speed limit or evading taxes.<sup>64</sup> Most certainly not with the same emotional intensity and distress that comes up when the issue is illegal immigration. When someone breaks one point of the law, does he not break the whole law? Yes, according to Scriptures.<sup>65</sup> Traditionally some sins are considered “worse” than others. 1 Cor 6: 9-10 lists some sins:

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither the immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor sexual perverts, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor robbers will inherit the kingdom of God.

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<sup>62</sup> Is 64:6 “We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.”

<sup>63</sup> Prv 20:10 “Diverse weights and diverse measures are both alike an abomination to the LORD.”

<sup>64</sup> Rom 13:7 “Pay all of them their dues, taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due.”

<sup>65</sup> Jas 2:10 “For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it.”

The sin of greed is listed together with sexual sins, but how much more emphasis does the church give to sexual sins than greed! USA culture accepts greed masked as healthy ambition and it breeds inside the Body of Christ unchecked.

We are all humans. All Christians were sinners, and now are saved by God's grace. Although we don't want to live sinning, we do sin.<sup>66</sup> Yet, laws change but God's word does not.<sup>67</sup> So while the speed limit might change on some roads, making those who once drove at 70 mph in a 50 mph zone not break the law any longer (if the limit goes to 70 mph and they don't decide to exceed 70 mph) God's view on abortion will never change. And while an immigrant who is here illegally might one day become legal, God's command to love them will never go away and should not be ignored.

I propose further, that whenever speaking of basic needs: food, clothing and shelter (which are the biggest motivators for undocumented immigrants to come and stay in the USA), the Lord brings His provision sometimes in an "unlawful" way. When David found himself in dire need of food for himself and his warriors, he approached the Priest, who made an exception to the rule and provided him with consecrated bread, which only the priests were allowed to eat.

So the priest gave him the holy bread; for there was no bread there but the bread of the Presence, which is removed from before the LORD, to be replaced by hot bread on the day it is taken away. 1 Sm 21:6

Matthew, Mark and Luke narrate Jesus' validation of this, and in fact, acting with his disciples, picking up food (like the foreigners, widows and orphans were allowed to do) in the harvest fields that had some grains left behind. Only, it was a Sabbath!

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<sup>66</sup> 1 Jn 1:8-10 "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us."

<sup>67</sup> Is 40:8 "The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand for ever."



At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath; his disciples were hungry, and they began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. But when the Pharisees saw it, they said to him, "Look, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath." He said to them, "Have you not read what David did, when he was hungry, and those who were with him: how he entered the house of God and ate the bread of the Presence, which it was not lawful for him to eat nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests? Or have you not read in the law how on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are guiltless? I tell you, something greater than the temple is here. And if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of man is lord of the Sabbath." And he went on from there, and entered their synagogue. Mt 12:1-9

Jesus is not saying that all people were to have access to the holy bread or that is was acceptable to break the Sabbath, but He was certainly establishing that there are some situations that require a higher law to be followed despite the fact that a person might be breaking another one. This would mean that just like David acted illegally yet was not condemned (remained guiltless) the undocumented immigrants who stay out of status for lack of opportunity to legalize are not sinning, though they are breaking the law.

Some undocumented immigrants might be sinning by staying here, others might not be sinning. It is difficult to judge it rightly. Because it is so complex, should it not be left to the individual and God? We must remember that God desires mercy.<sup>68</sup>

It remains then, that the laws Christians are to follow primarily are God's laws<sup>69</sup> that is, if we do indeed recognize Scriptures as the authoritative text of conduct and faith. And God's laws are based in love.

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<sup>68</sup> Hos 6:6 "For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God, rather than burnt offerings." And "For I desire mercy and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings." (NKJ – underline mine)

<sup>69</sup> Acts 5:29 "But Peter and the apostles answered, we must obey God rather than men."

## Church: A Living Organism

The Church is a living being, a living organism, a family that demonstrates commitment and a covenant to one another, and forms and deepens relationships with God and others. The church exists for God and God has a mission for the church. The church does not exist for the mission, for the lost, but for God, who then, gives His people a mission to fulfill. Saying that the church exists for the lost is equivalent to saying that a husband exists for the women outside of his marriage. The church is to “be in Christ” and once this being in Him happens, from it flows the “doing.” If being the church becomes a set of things “to do,” then it quickly and easily turns into a religion destitute of life, which comes only in Him. The church is about incarnation (*kerygma*) – living the truth (the gift of presence); proclamation – speaking the truth with others; community – living the truth with others; demonstration – living/giving the truth for others (if it’s real love, there is physical evidence to it); growing/fruitfulness – maturing in the truth.<sup>70</sup> Another way to put it is to say that the ministry of the church must involve:

a) manifesting God’s presence, which we explored in the previous section, based on Jer 29:5-6;

b) praying for the city, which is the subject of the next section, based on Jer 29:7;

c) practicing the faith through action, also based on Jer 29:7; and,

d) proclaiming the good news.

“Presence, prayer, practice, proclamation – these are the shalom-building ministries of the church in society. They are not optional. We do not have the right to

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<sup>70</sup> Tom Johnston and Mike Perkinson, “The Crossing.” Leadership seminar materials. Manchester, NH: Praxis Center for Leadership Development, 2005.

choose between them. All of them together make up the substance of the work of God's people for our society's transformation."<sup>71</sup>

### **A Theology of Prayer: The City and Spirituality**

It is widely known that the Church's calling is to pray for the city. As Jack Hayford puts it:

1 Timothy 2:1-3 exhorts us all to prayer as our priority – 'first of all'; that those in authority may be covered and supported by the prayers of the saints. ... He calls us to pray *for* leaders, and to war *against* evil powers in the invisible realm (see Eph 6:10-12) so we can be a blessing to our culture. With this, He presents the promise of 'peaceableness' in the society, but only *if the Church fulfills its intercessory role*. Further, the 1 Timothy text adds that this call is *very* pragmatic in God's purposes: He gives it for the high *purpose that a climate for evangelism may be created!* (see 1 Tm 2:4,5).<sup>72</sup>

Nevertheless, "prayer does not *preclude* action, but *presupposes* it to the extent of our opportunity."<sup>73</sup> Humility, prayer, intimacy and repentance are important characteristics of anointed Christian service for the spirituality of the city, as shown in this text:

If my people, who are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land. Now mine eyes shall be open, and mine ears attentive, unto the prayer that is made in this place. 2 Chr 7:14-15

All of the good results that God promises, i.e. that He will hear from heaven, forgive the sin and heal the land, will come only if and after these things are present. If ever the people of God in a city fall into the sin of self-righteousness and look down on

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<sup>71</sup> Linthicum, *Transforming Power*, 78.

<sup>72</sup> Ted Haggard and Jack W. Hayford, *Loving Your City into the Kingdom: City-Reaching Strategies for a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Revival* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1997), 17-18.

<sup>73</sup> Stanley D. Gale, *Community Houses of Prayer: Ministry Manual* (Los Alamos, NM: Deo Volente Publishing, 2002), 20.

sinner, the witness of the Gospel will be so compromised that it will eventually become ineffective. On the other hand, if the Church gets so involved in doing the good works but forgets being the children of God and talking to the Father, again, the mission of the Church will be in jeopardy. I submit that some leaders of the Church get so caught up in programs and external activities that, as long as the church is growing quantitatively – and perhaps financially – congregational and individual prayer life may be neglected and put to a second category. Many times prayer is not public, it does not attract the attention of the masses, it is not entertaining, thus it is done as a “must-do” thing, half-heartedly and without urgency. As long as the ministry demands public attention and feeds pride, prayer may not be exercised to its full potential. Thus, first, we must humble ourselves, then pray. Alternatively, we can choose to pray and allow ourselves to be humbled as we pray, for through prayer we are admitting to ourselves and to the One we pray to that we are dependent on Him, that we cannot possibly be whom He has created us to be, or do what He has purposed for us to do, in our own strength, but that we need Him in us and His power operating through us. We recognize that even our own individual problems – finances, family issues, health needs – are already too complicated for us to deal with, let alone the systemic problems of the city!

Moreover, prayer is qualified in the passage. When we pray, we are not only to seek God’s hands, his power to intervene in situations and touch people and things, but He desires that we also seek His face. This points to intimacy, to the desire of the Father to have communion, fellowship with his children, based on love and delight on each other. Once we do seek God’s face, having humbled ourselves and prayed, there will be a revelation of the sin that besets the city, corporately and individually, which will require a

response from the people that are interacting with God: it requires repentance. We simply cannot go on living like always and expect something to change. God in His mercy will reveal the root sins of the city, the causes of the current bad realities and repentance is our expected response to this. After repentance, God, who is a loving and forgiving God, will hear our prayers, forgive our sins and He will, then, have the appropriate environment to work His wondrous acts of deliverance and healing of the land. In our human realm, this might mean spiritual warfare, to take hold of what God has delivered and healed in the spiritual realm. We must continuously pray to (1) stop only reacting to the attacks of the evil powers; (2) maintain what ground has been conquered for the Kingdom of God; (3) advance the territory and spread the Gospel wider.

How can we pray for the city? How can we pray for undocumented immigrants? Psalm 122 is an essential model for the person who wants to intercede for the city. Following it, we can ask God holistically and not in a partial or self-centered manner. First, the psalmist calls us to pray for the economic health of the city, a cry for all in the city to enjoy economical prosperity, not only the rich ones. Then, pray for the safety of the city (Ps122:7), for its citizens and also pray for those who commit the crimes (Heb13:3). Next, pray for the political order, the governing powers, so that they may act as their position requires and make way for justice. Following, pray for the people. The psalmist reminds us that we do need to pray for individuals and groups of people, for the commoners as well the distinguished. We must pray for them simply by the fact that they live in the same place that we do. We need to pray for them so they can discover the *shalom* of God. Finally, persist praying. Scriptures shows us that we need to persevere in prayer and be responsible in it. The prophet instructed the people of God: “Upon your

walls, O Jerusalem, I have set watchmen; all the day and all the night they shall never be silent. You who put the LORD in remembrance, take no rest, and give him no rest until he establishes Jerusalem and makes it a praise in the earth” (Is 62:6-7).

Our faith can be better celebrated in the city by the union of all cells of the Body of Christ in purpose. Currently, it is normal to see the Church in a city split up so many times over that it becomes impossible to identify the common thread in all of them, beyond the fact that they all call themselves “church.” Unity, not uniformity, must be pursued and, once achieved, become the norm for the living of the Church in any city. Yes, still the divisions will remain as far as denominational preferences, legal structures, etc. but when pastors and leaders, to begin with, can gather together and seek God together for the city, a different dynamic is put in action that far outweighs the influence of our current situation. When the “called out ones” meet and agree in intercession for God to move, He will. Kingdom-minded intercession, the type that does not care if the result of their prayers is the increase of membership in his church or in another one, moves the heart of God and sparks a series of spiritual dynamics that ultimately will dethrone the evil powers that control the spiritual real in the city, and will open up the heavens for a true city-wide transformation through the power of the gospel. Historically, whenever churches unite in heart and prayer, there is change in the spiritual climate of the city and many salvations happen, many new churches (congregations) are started, and society sees transformation. However, “missionary responsibility does not end when a church is initially planted. It moves on to equip the developing church

through instruction, leadership training, and establishment of outreach programs so that the gospel may continue to spread to entire cities and nations.”<sup>74</sup>

It is necessary for the Church to obey Christ’s command in Mt 28:18-20 and in going, (migrating) make disciples, baptize them and teach them to obey Jesus’ commands. The best way to do this, contrary to what we have mostly seen so far is not to put the new Christians in a classroom and pour information into their brains. The most impacting and fruitful way to make a disciple and teach him is through relationship. This approach requires more of the discipler in terms of time and commitment, but it is an exceedingly more effective method of training new leaders than any institution could ever manage to produce. We can disciple the nations, if we go to our neighbor and develop a relationship. The nations have come to the USA, and from here many will go back to their countries. They could go back and take the Word of God in their hearts and spread the Kingdom of God there, but this will only happen if we open our hearts to them and accept them into the family of God while they are here as immigrants. Not every immigrant in the USA is here to stay permanently. Many will leave because they want to go back to their beloved land. Are we going to take this opportunity to reach them with the Gospel or are we going to reject their presence here and then spend thousands of dollars to go to their very countries in short-term missions trips? The missionaries are here! As immigrant Christians are trained in the midst of their normal life, with demands from work, family, social activities, they are better positioned to experiment the teachings they are receiving and to grow in knowledge and deed in the Word of God. Love them, share the gospel with them, train them, pray for them. They can bring joy to their cities:

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<sup>74</sup> Roger S. Greenway and Timothy M. Monsma, *Cities Missions’ New Frontier, Second Edition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 74.

Acts 8:4, 8 “Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word. So there was much joy in that city.”

How can we pray for justice for the undocumented immigrant when the whole issue is so complex and long standing? Dorothy Friesen offers a perspective:

If we dare to entrust to the love of God those problems which are vastly beyond our capacities to solve, such as peace or justice, we can do so honestly only in the knowledge that at least on our own level we must be workers for peace and justice. Our prayers must bring us back to the specific, in order to take a large view without being abstract. Our prayers must bring us back to our immediate and concrete responsibilities well as to that larger and more indirect relationship which is political and economic. Everything is interrelated, in a tenuous and usually hidden way. Intercessory prayer cannot get along without information on the life of the world.<sup>75</sup>

We must pray and act. Be informed, be involved and pray trusting God’s love for those on whose behalf we are praying.

When Jesus taught his disciples how to pray, he indicated that God’s desire for life on earth is that his will be done here “as it is in heaven” (Mt 6:10). Heaven is the model for the life of those who will live there forever. As children of God we serve our Father, the King of the Universe, by establishing His kingdom on earth (see Christ’s rebuke to the teachers of the Law and Pharisees in Mt 23:13), reflecting as a mirror, the realities found in heaven. There, He is worshiped day and night (Rv 4:8); His glory shines so strong that no luminary is needed (Rv 21:23) and the righteous shine with Him (Mt 13:43); there are people from every tongue and tribe and nation (Rv 5:9) before His throne (Rv 7:9); and people from all over the world will reign on the earth (Rv 5:10).

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<sup>75</sup> Dorothy Friesen, “Social Action and the Need for Prayer” in *Peace is the Way: Writing on Nonviolence from the Fellowship of Reconciliation*, Walter Wink, ed., (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000), 128, quoting Pierre Yves Emery.



There is a big chasm between the realities of Heaven above and our current realities on Earth below.

Jesus' words in Matthew show that we are required to be salt and light (Mt 5:13-16), which implies being different from the world, in order to make a difference in it. But when someone looks at the situation within the local churches and among churches in any given city, he may come to the conclusion that there is nothing peculiar among them, and that they could be considered mere "businesses" competing against each other. To the uninformed observer, it may look interesting, if not intriguing, that there is such a thing as a "Black church" and a "White church" and a "Hispanic church" and a "Brazilian church," etc. To the church-goers and the faithful Christians that meet in separate groups, separation may initially look like the best way to go because it brings the chance to be their own selves and not battle feelings of inadequacy, but deep down it carries within its very concept, the painful message of rejection and inequality. First generation immigrants usually prefer a mono-cultural church setting but the one-and-a-half and the second generations need to find open doors and open hearts in the national churches. By bringing people from different cultures and languages together we pursue peace and the joyful celebration of each person's identity in an accepting and visible way.

Jesus' own prayer to the Father before he made his final sacrifice at the cross pleaded:

I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. Jn 17:22-23

Some might interpret this verse with an application to individuals, but the general sense of the verse is speaking about the corporate Church. Unity in the Church is Jesus'

prayer for us. We want to become an answer to Jesus' prayer! The purpose of unity though, is not uniformity, so that we all look, act, and speak the same. On the contrary, drawing from the richness of diversity in holiness, we are to be united as a means to let the world know that the Father has sent Jesus and loved the world as much as the Father has loved Jesus.

### Fellow Citizens

In the Old Testament, even among the Israelites that fled from Egypt under Moses' leadership, there were non-Jews in the crowd (Ex 12:38), and God made provisions for their co-existence with His chosen people. However, in Eph 2:11-22, Paul writes that God has removed the barrier of hostility between nationalities and now there is no one ethnicity or language or culture that is above the other, or even preferred. With the Gentiles now being called fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household (v. 19), there is room for reconciliation, which comes from being "in Christ" (v. 15), being reconciled together to God, by the same means of the cross.

Reconciliation begins in tension but its working out is peace. In order to pursue reconciliation, which brings along pain, we must love. 1 John 4:20-21 declares clearly that whoever loves God must also love his brother, so we that have been reconciled to God must be able to extend reconciliation to our brother.

In Matthew 22:36, Jesus is asked "Teacher, which is the greatest command of the Law?"

And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first

commandment. And a second is like it, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets. Mt 22:37-40

Who is my neighbor? In the parable that Jesus told to exemplify the meaning of his command, he placed a Samaritan, a people group the listeners despised, as the character who was righteous, who was a good neighbor to the suffering man. We must be “good neighbors” in the same way, even if it means to get involved in cross-cultural relationships.

God has explicitly given us all the ministry of reconciliation, (2 Cor 5:17-21). This means reconciliation with God through Christ, but also among humans, living out, again, what heaven is like, here on earth.

### **What Is Next?**

In this chapter I provided a Theological basis for the ministry of the church to undocumented immigrants through the three parts of the Theological Framework of Urban Ministry that I adopt.

In the Theology of Place (context), I highlighted that God loves the city. Christians should love the city just as God does, but in order to avoid nativism, which places the loyalty to the country above one’s loyalty to God, the Christian must decide to put God first in his life and thinking process. I also expounded on the fact that every human carries God’s image within, and that God requires His people to protect the alien, because we are all considered aliens in this earth, once we have established our citizenship in Heaven. Because the Son of God was a foreigner (a missionary), He calls the “least of these” His family and expects His people to treat them well and provide for

them. The dangers of total assimilation were exemplified through the story of Lot and his family. Finally, the call of the church to work with the city was shown, along with the different expressions of people's discipleship to Jesus.

In the Theology of Peace (ministry) the exile experience of immigrants was explored from two different perspectives: the possibility of exile as punishment and the alternative, but co-existing option of exile as God's will, someone being sent somewhere by God. The richness of the various meanings of the Hebrew term *shalom* and its Greek counterpart *eirene* were studied to demonstrate more fully God's intentions for the city, to be achieved through His people. The basic foundation of Christian ministry in the city was reaffirmed by considering some Scripture passages that directly speak to the concepts of love and justice, and for the application to ministry to undocumented immigrants, an intersection of these two concepts in practice was given. For Christians to become peacemakers on behalf of undocumented immigrants there must be an understanding of the difference between sin and illegality. I demonstrated that illegality is not a crime per se. It is a civil right with responsibilities. In some cases, the person living in an illegal status has no choice over the matter (ex. youth who came brought by their parents). In other situations, it is a choice to break a law, and take a risk of being caught, much like any driver takes a risk of being stopped by police when going over the speed limit or crossing in the red light. Yet, it is a distortion of the American Christian culture to depict illegality as enormously more law-defying than speed driving. Most often discrimination in church ministry does not occur when a speed driver is to receive (or offer) ministry, but as for illegal immigration, it is always a question and sometimes a condition that may bar one of receiving and giving ministry.

In the Theology of Prayer (spirituality) I utilized Psalm 122 as a model for intercession for the city. I stressed the importance of being informed on this matter in order to be able to offer informed prayers to God on behalf of the undocumented immigrants. The importance of personal discipleship – prayer and action – was shown, as well as Jesus’ call for the church to be salt and light. The neighbor, the undocumented immigrant, is to be loved and if we need to be reconciled to them, because of barriers we ourselves have raised, we are called to do so.

A Theology of the Undocumented Immigrant takes into consideration the three facets of Theology above summarized. As Christians, no matter what earthly citizenship we hold, we are fellow citizens of our unique, glorious city in Heaven.

In the next chapter, I will offer a paradigm and a strategy for the church’s ministry to undocumented immigrants.

## **Chapter 4**

### **The Ministry of the Church to Undocumented Immigrants in the Greater Boston Area**

The practice of the faith through works becomes the focus now, as we explore ways that the church can visibly express its call to seek the *shalom* of the city. Initially, and most commonly, there is the ministry of evangelization. Some churches find it difficult to motivate their members to do this simple task, even when they understand evangelization only as orally sharing the gospel and “convincing” the sinner to accept Christ without any relationship building involved on the part of the Christian who is sharing the message. A number of churches define their existence only by the mission of fellowship among themselves and sharing, or preaching the gospel to others. This is a good start but it should not be the whole definition of the church’s mission. Immigrants in general have been pulled away (or have walked away) from their original social circles and families and many describe the beginning of their life in the new country as a re-start, or a self-invention of their own persona. Relationship building becomes a major point of entry to the message of the gospel in this new community. Immigrants want more than a nice speech about God’s love for their souls - they have a felt need to develop a new social network of friends, colleagues and advisers. The message of the gospel if disconnected from genuine relationship building will become a hollow sound to the ear of the immigrant. If the church wants to communicate that Jesus loves people – all people – the church must love them in action more than in words.

## The Church as a Relief Agent

The church is also to be involved in ministries of mercy, Christian ministry or service of *shalom* to a hurting and broken humanity, acting as an agent of reconciliation, welfare and justice (*diakonia*).<sup>1</sup> The ministry of *diakonia* is to serve all people, but preference should be given to the poor and the oppressed.<sup>2</sup> In the practice of *diakonia* the church can find ways to deepen and widen its reach. Most commonly, there is involvement with the relief aspect of the ministry. It touches people to see others in suffering and when they are able to, they like to be involved in providing a solution, even if it is for the short-term. Although USA Christians sometimes struggle to allow themselves to be touched by the suffering of immigrants, especially in areas of concentration of the immigrant community which brings transformation to the neighborhood (not always desired, not always positive), whenever the Holy Spirit convicts and breaks the hearts of the Christians to look at the harvest and see that the fields are ready, and that suffering prevails, it is often through ministries of mercy that the process of church ministry to the “target” community begins. As a result of the sensitization of the Holy Spirit in the lives of Christians towards human suffering, we see many individuals willing to go abroad for short-term mission trips, but never open to commit to medium or long-term assignments. Giving a little money, volunteering a little here and a little there soothes the conscience of the donor and gives needed help to the

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<sup>1</sup> Eldin Villafañe, D.Min. Residency lecture in the course “Seek the Peace of the City: Theology and Ethics for Urban Ministry” (lecture, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Boston, MA, June 10, 2005).

<sup>2</sup> Jas 2:5-7 “Listen, my beloved brethren. Has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which he has promised to those who love him? But you have dishonored the poor man. Is it not the rich who oppress you, is it not they who drag you into court? Is it not they who blaspheme that honorable name which was invoked over you?” and Mt 11.

victim (ex. hurricanes relief funds are considerably easily collected), yet it is one thing to be intense for a short time and another entirely different proposal to commit to something for the mid or long-term. The same phenomenon occurs in the daily life of ministry in the city. Charity and benevolence require some involvement, but not necessarily a strong commitment. Food pantries, emergency housing, prisoner visitation ministries, etc. are relatively easy to find among Christian churches in any given city and can be run by a relatively small number of volunteers with a high turn over. At this level of *diakonia* we can find some churches desiring to minister to immigrants, but even then some question if they are doing the right thing, since they know that some of the people benefiting from their assistance are undocumented. Since we have established that the law of love supersedes any other human law, the church must be willing to involve the immigrant community in its deeds of emergency relief and urgent care. Some food pantries require so many identification documents that undocumented immigrants are virtually excluded from any possibility to receive any help.

### Individual Development

The next level of Christian service would involve individual development, so that, if possible, the needy would be enabled to get out of the situation of need and empowered to provide for him/herself. This requires more time, effort, and involvement in the cause. It would require education, training, skills development, political involvement, and for such, a longer term of commitment is necessary. For the woman who first showed up needing emergency housing because of domestic violence, it would now be the time to



educate and train her in some marketable skill that will enable her to make a living without depending financially on the abuser or government assistance. If she already has those skills, she might need friendly support and encouragement to build the needed confidence in herself as the provider and self-supported person she can be and to move on with her life. For the undocumented immigrant, it would be the time to understand his true needs and make an effort to help. This can take the form of offering ESL classes, responding to the need of language learning; adult Theology classes at the Institute level, preferably in their language to develop Christian character and maturity as well as Bible knowledge and eventually, new leadership; companionship, defending the undocumented immigrant's best interests so that they are not exploited (ex. looking for an honest immigration attorney and accompanying the immigrant to the appointment, maybe interpreting for him, if needed and if possible); inviting the immigrant to a Thanksgiving dinner with one's own family, providing for acceptance and validating the immigrant's own inherent value as a human being that needs to love and be loved.

### Social Development

A third level of service, faces social development needs and gets involved in working with and mobilizing the poor and needy to provide community services for themselves. In the housing sector, an example of this would be the church working as a facilitator or promoter of affordable housing construction and rehabilitation. For the immigrant, it could mean classes and seminars on how to open a legal and legitimate

business to provide for his family, giving instruction on what kind of insurance is needed, what types of forms are to be filled out, what taxes are to be paid to the government, etc.

## Social Justice

Lastly, reaching the level of working for social justice, the church will clearly be seen as an organism that seeks the *shalom* of the city through advocacy, congregational-based community organizing, and community conflict transformation. “It is the job of God’s people to “stand in the breach” and defend the cause of the poor, the powerless and the marginalized before the “principalities and powers” of the city and state.”<sup>3</sup>

In the case of illegal immigration, the undocumented people really need representatives, common people who will take their place in demonstrations, marches, and in signing petitions and things of this nature. By virtue of their immigration status, undocumented people *live in the shadows* and fear that their presence in these manifestations would be risky for them. So, the American-born church people, the *green card* bearers, and the naturalized citizens can take their place, as representatives for the cause of more just laws and humane treatment of undocumented people.

## The Way the Church Worships

Besides *kerygma* and *diakonia*, the ministry of the church in the city requires *leitourgia*. Worship in our days is frequently misunderstood to mean only a specific

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<sup>3</sup> Linthicum, *Transforming Power*, 77.

period of time on Sunday, during public service, when the “worship team” or “church choir” goes up to the platform with their instruments and a set of chosen songs/hymns to lead the congregation in singing and prayer. It’s almost seen as a half-hour activity that is part of the public meeting of the church, and nothing else. Biblical worship has very little of this concept, but it is deeply concerned with our heart, our daily actions and choices. It may or may not include singing, dancing, clapping our hands. These are but a few outward expressions that the Bible encourages us, and sometimes directs us, to use in expressing our worship to God Almighty. Worship is the recognition of who God is, His character, sovereignty, love and power. It also includes knowing and obeying His word, His commands and laws. Worship includes doing acts that promote or bring about reconciliation of person to God and person to person. It demands that we place ourselves low, humbling ourselves before the throne of Almighty God and bring Him the sacrifices of praise (ourselves dead to our selves). We are to worship him everywhere, and all the time, with every breath that we take, and in everything that we do.

When the church ministers to the poor, helping the poor should not be seen as an end in itself, but as an act of worship, demonstrating God’s love for the poor, bringing His glory to earth, touching lives with our hands as manifestations of the body of Christ. When the USA church ministers to immigrants, it denies itself, dies to its own desires and traditions and opens itself up to the new thing the Lord is doing,<sup>4</sup> which is marvelous in our eyes,<sup>5</sup> bringing those who were rejected in their own countries, expelled by injustice

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<sup>4</sup> Is 43:19 “Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.”

<sup>5</sup> Ps 118:23 “The stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner. This is the LORD’s doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day which the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.”

and oppression and brought to the church in the USA to lay a foundation of multicultural worship in the house of Lord, reflecting heaven on earth.<sup>6</sup>

As mentioned above, immigrants come from every strata of society: poor, oppressed, uneducated, middle class, oppressors, highly educated, and in as many variables as there are possibilities. Immigrants who come to the USA in order to better their lives are not doing anything that is uncommon to mankind and not a sin in itself. They are looking for better opportunities, just as anybody else. In their quest for a better life (financial opportunities, public safety, education, health care, public infra-structure, are some of the elements that could define a better life), some immigrants have come from their countries into the USA by invitation, duly sponsored to a visa; others have come on their own, and once in the country have found a visa sponsor and obtained legal resident status; others have come on their own, decided to overstay their visa, or entered the country without a visa, which resulted in their current status of undocumented immigrants. Although I am not saying that the church should approve of some of these choices, and I am certainly not saying that the church should help the undocumented immigrants procure and obtain false documents, in order to obtain jobs and other needs, I am saying that it seems incongruent to the Christian faith to condition our offer to love and accept people into our fellowship based upon their immigration status. To bring it closer to our hearts, consider this: if we keep our ancestry roots in mind, we might find that many of our own family in generations past, immigrated illegally to one place or another. How would we as Christians today react if we read in their treasured personal

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<sup>6</sup> Rv 7:9-10 “After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no man could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb!””

journals that they went to a church in the late 1800's but were not accepted into the fellowship due to their immigration status and because of that they never wanted a relationship with God? As we worship God (beyond singing and praying with our eyes closed) extending God's love to all who desire to know Him, and offer them a loving fellowship, we are indeed cooperating with the Holy Spirit to make His kingdom come. People's illegal status may be temporary and so may be the window of opportunity to reach any individual with God's salvific message and love. Let us not waste it.

In the 5<sup>th</sup> chapter of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians he deals with the problem of immorality inside the church and gives instructions to expel (drive out) the wicked person (other translations say evil person) from among the brethren. Is being illegally in the country immoral or a basis for expelling someone from church (or offering fellowship and material help to them)? In the context of the chapter, Paul is dealing specifically with the sins of the flesh (the example he gives is a man living with his father's wife), but in verse 11 he gives a list that expounds the kinds of sins that he is addressing in the passage:

I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with immoral men; not at all meaning the immoral of this world, or the greedy and robbers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But rather I wrote to you not to associate with any one who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or robber - not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside. "Drive out the wicked person from among you." 1 Cor 5:9-13

Church leaders are again called to act within the whole counsel of Scriptures, exercising love, justice, compassion, and mercy, in the process of following Paul's directive as described above. My position in this thesis is that if the church is going to

strictly follow these directives as it refers to undocumented immigrants (ex. categorizing all as greedy people), then in order to exercise the justice that God requires of His people, the church must also deal as harshly with the American executives that all but abandon their families in order to pursue a more financially rewarding career. If the greedy undocumented is immoral, then the business executive who does not tend for his family is immoral as well and if one is to be expelled from the church, then the other should also be.

Ephesians 3:8-12 reveals another important role of the church in the city. This passage focuses on the perception of what the church has to offer to the city to substitute the lies by which the people oriented their life before Christ. In Ephesians 3:10, Paul writes that God's intention is "that through the church, the manifold<sup>7</sup> wisdom of God might be now made known." It is the calling of the urban church to witness about the multi-faceted work that God has done through Christ in the city, its inhabitants, systems and high powers. This witness is a calling for the city to recognize its spiritual depth and to allow that this dimension be transformed in Christ. Christian immigrants (documented and undocumented) have a major role to play in the expression of God's multifaceted wisdom in the city. Different celebratory styles, different ways of presenting God's message, different perspectives on church ministry can collaborate and enrich the church's presence and expression of Christ in the city.

The church must also face its vocation, to seek the *shalom* of the city as representatives of the Kingdom of God in it, as one to seek the city's spiritual transformation, including, necessarily, the corporate systems, structures, with their lies

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<sup>7</sup> Another way to translate "manifold" would be "multi-faceted."

duly exposed and substituted by the truth of Christ. It is common to find individuals and even whole churches and Christian movements tending to one of the extreme sides of Christian practice: the mystical and the practical. Those who tend to the mystical side preach and understand that everything will be solved through the power of God. It is enough to pray and trust! To this group of people, the whole immigration challenge can be solved through prayer alone. Those who lean to the practical side risk acting with so much dedication and excellence in areas and in ways that are not what God has in mind for the situation that they end up selling out their identity of children of God, becoming mere social services organizations, without the gospel at the root of their actions. This camp would look at the immigration challenge as a series of tasks to be performed for social justice, political lobbying, street demonstrations, community mobilizing, but they would get so involved in the action that they forget the motivation behind it all. As the people of God, we need to find the way to practice the fullness of both and comprehend that God does the impossible, the miracles, the general plan of the Universe that belongs to Him, but that the things that He has entrusted us to do must be done by us.

Urban dynamics require that we incarnate the gospel, the message of *shalom*, understanding that we work in and with complex systems because the city is a complex system. We also need to know how to work within this system, for in fact either we work understanding the system or the system will tear us apart. The immigration issue in the USA is a clear example of this statement. If USA Christians learn and understand international labor dynamics, the immigration system and recognize the good and the evil in it (ex. unjust quotas to “undesirable” nationalities), and are able to put God ahead of the Nation in our hearts, then we can stay united and work together for justice in the

immigration system, while welcoming the undocumented immigrant, treating him as God's image bearer and being concerned with each aspect of their lives. If we do not get informed (for fear of what the information might do to our convictions and traditions, or otherwise), if we do not understand the immigration system and its implications to the global community, then we will not regard immigrants as valuable to the country and we will be torn apart in our Christian witness, failing to fulfill the summary of the law which is love. If we are torn apart, our *shalom* is gone and we can no longer be agents of "*shalom*."

As an example of the complexity of the illegal immigration dynamics in the USA, consider the raid of March 2007 in New Bedford, Massachusetts. Federal immigration officers came unannounced into a manufacturer company in New Bedford and initially separated Americans from non-Americans. Next, they verified the documentation or lack thereof, of every immigrant. The final result was that hundreds of undocumented immigrants were arrested and quickly transferred out of state. In one day, hundreds of families were split apart and worse, babies and children that had no one other than their mothers to care for them were left without their mother because she was transported away based on her illegal status. Work conditions for immigrants at the manufacturer were reportedly unacceptable and resembled slavery: workers could not make a bathroom visit longer than 2 minutes, they were not allowed to talk during work, they were penalized if ever caught talking on the phone and they were never paid the required time-and-a-half rate for overtime. Days later, while immigrant advocacy groups cried out on the behalf of the forcibly abandoned children, Americans were taking the jobs once performed by the immigrants. In a TV interview, I heard Americans say that they were sorry for those



immigrants' families, but at the same time they were happy because now they could have a job. Not much is said about the fact that the job that those Americans got is not the job the immigrants had. On the surface it may look like so because they may be performing the same tasks, but in a deeper analysis one may realize why the owner of the company chose to employ some undocumented immigrants. They were used and abused for a very low rate of pay. The job that perhaps one hundred immigrants performed in the conditions they had, will now require at the very least another fifty non-immigrant, or legal employees to cover, and at a much higher price for the company.

So far the “bad guy” has been only the immigrant in the media reports, but there is also major financial interests in this situation on the part of the company owners, who knowingly defied the law by hiring unemployable immigrants, and saved money in all fronts: by not paying the reasonable rate they would be required to pay an American employee; by not paying overtime; by not giving them lawful breaks; and possibly by not paying any benefits or workers taxes for them. With time, given the chance, the owners of the factory that employed the undocumented immigrants might let go of the American or legal workers who cost more to employ, and hire other undocumented immigrants in order to cut costs and increase their own profit.

The church needs to be engaged in complex thinking about the social and spiritual realities of our days to be relevant and biblical, while operating within the laws of the land. Regarding USA immigration laws, I am not suggesting that all of them are wrong or unjust. Also, I am not trying to defend open borders, which would show complete disregard from the government to the people of the USA who work very hard, and sacrifice to build and maintain a country that is still very attractive to the citizens of other

countries. The focus of this thesis is not immigration law as a whole, but the church's response to the presence of undocumented immigrants in the Greater Boston area particularly. However, whenever a law is approved which calls for the church to act as a law enforcement agency and goes against God's higher commands in the Bible (love, justice, compassion, etc.) the church should address these unjust laws. I am convinced that the same that Jesus said about the poor ("the poor you will always have with you")<sup>8</sup> we could say about undocumented immigrants – not only are they everywhere, but they will always be there. The church must decide how to minister to them.

Free will is God's gift to humankind (for better or worse) and because of that, every individual has the ability to make their own decisions, some of which will be sinful. The church cannot force anyone to repent, to change their ways and to walk blamelessly before the Lord. At all times, the church can and should preach the Word of Truth and allow the Holy Spirit do the convincing of sin and judgment. In the case of undocumented immigrants who left their country and came to the USA only in search of a better life, when they already had a middle/high class lifestyle in their country of origin, the church faces a situation in which her opinion was not asked before the fact. Put in another way, the church has not asked the undocumented immigrants to leave their country and come to the USA to stay illegally, nor have the undocumented immigrants asked the church if they should do so before they did it. But now that by their free will these people in search of more wealth have arrived at the church doors, what is the church to do? Shall we close our doors because they are here illegally? Shall we not demonstrate the character of God in compassion for their lives?

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<sup>8</sup> Mk 14:7 "For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you will, you can do good to them; but you will not always have me."

The church is called to announce the Truth of the Bible and it should do so. On some occasions, Brazilian pastors have confronted the husbands and fathers who left their wives and children in Brazil while they came here to make extra money, and told them that they were doing wrong, by abandoning their families. Some of these men have heard those words and decided to go back and be reunited to their families. Others have decided to work even longer hours and save more money to make it possible for their families to be reunited to them in the USA (often as undocumented immigrants as well), and still others have decided to stay here and divorce the wives they left in Brazil and start a whole new family in the USA!

The church can show the way but not force anyone to follow it. Just as Moses proclaimed the blessings of obedience and the curses of disobedience and recommended for the people to choose the blessing, we can as much as we know each individual story, assist immigrants in understanding right and wrong and indicate that the right way pleases God, but ultimately the final decision is in the hands of the individual. Case by case, in an informed way, compassionate, just and empowering decisions can be made by the church, regarding leadership positions and spiritual authority, in reference to each individual's story.

As a result of the immigration raids in New Bedford, dozens of children were left motherless. Should the church remain coldly observing the situation? No. Government should do the law enforcing acts as is their responsibility, and the church should not interfere with that unless the actions of the government were inhumane and violated people's civil rights. Although the mothers were here illegally and were aware of their risks and the possibility of sudden deportation, they are people, humans, and their

children deserve to be cared for. At this level, regardless of immigration status, the church should serve people, even if that means dealing with the left over messes that undocumented immigrants created for themselves by choosing to stay in the USA illegally.

The spiritual needs of undocumented immigrants are common to humankind. They need to be saved, delivered, enabled to receive grace, trained in doing good, corrected, exhorted, challenged, equipped, empowered and released. The church needs to find in God the direction to rightly practice the Word of God as it ministers to undocumented immigrants.

Personal *shalom* in the complexity of the city and the incarnation of the Gospel require an intimate theology and a commitment to understanding our context as well as the power of God to work through us in that context. The work of incarnation in the complex system is not just the proclamation of peace and of new life in Christ. The power of God's love and the depth and richness of His salvation is lost whenever His word is preached only by words. It is necessary that it be lived out in experience, showing God's concern for human beings in every aspect of their lives. We should not preach the gospel incompletely, compartmentalized as though God were only concerned about people's "souls" and spiritual interests and did not care about their basic physical and emotional needs.

## **Urban Renewal**

Greenway writes that true urban renewal happens when a four-fold process takes place. First there is the rejection of evil, then commitment to good, followed by obedience to God and hearing God's word. Following Greenway's four characteristics of urban renewal, I believe the story narrated in Acts 2:14-47 could be a New Testament example of such, but in a diverse order:

- 1) The people heard God's word preached by Peter (vv. 14-36);
- 2) They repented from their wrongdoings, rejecting evil (vv. 41);
- 3) Next, they were committed to good (vv. 42-43);
- 4) They also obeyed God, living as a community of love (vv. 44-47).

Having a Word of the Lord, as Greenway contends, is necessary for a real urban renewal, and is the secret, the "recipe" for the starting of a new time in all the city's strata. It will bring on spiritual warfare (Acts 13:44-51), but the Holy Spirit will confirm His will in God's children and give His joy and of Himself to them (Acts 13:52). The application of Greenway's four-fold process to spiritual renewal in the city to the church's ministry to undocumented immigrants, based on Scripture texts would produce the following path:

### **Rejection of Evil**

If any local church in the USA has been neglecting to include immigrants in their congregation and immigrants' needs in their prayers and social action systems, God calls

this church to repentance. It may be the case that some undocumented immigrants will be convicted by God that what they are doing is evil and out of God's will, and that they need to abandon it in order to seek peace with God.

Let him turn away from evil and do right; let him seek peace and pursue it.  
1 Pt 3:11

Every individual, every congregation is called to corporately search their hearts in the mirror of the Word of God. The expressions "seek justice" and "correct oppression," among others in the passage above, are not simple thoughts we should have and shortly after forget about. Nor are these simple feelings to feel and cause tears to drop from our eyes in prayer. They are action-loaded commands that require a long-term commitment. If the church is obedient to God, the church will be a channel of blessing to this Nation, and will be able to offer a well-informed, Holy Spirit guided ministry to the undocumented immigrants. As Ronald J. Sider writes,

We also need to discover that in the Bible, sin is both personal and social. Again and again, the prophets make it perfectly clear that we sin both by lying, stealing, and committing adultery, and also by participating in unjust legal and economic systems without doing what God wants us to do to change them. Sin is both personal and social, overcoming evil demands both personal and structural transformation. But evangelicals still do not understand this.<sup>9</sup>

And the Word clearly gives us direct commands to reject evil, through passages such as this:

Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow. "Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool. If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; but if you refuse and

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<sup>9</sup> Ronald J. Sider, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience: Why are Christians Living Just Like the Rest of the World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005), 74.

rebel, you shall be devoured by the sword; for the mouth of the LORD has spoken. Isa 1:16-20

Government authorities must recognize and confess that the Lord is correct and that some laws are unjust and that people's aversion to immigrants is wrong. This will only come to pass through heartfelt and Spirit-led prayer and intercession for the authorities in every realm of this country, accompanied by hard work and social involvement.

Then Pharaoh sent, and called Moses and Aaron, and said to them, "I have sinned this time; the LORD is in the right, and I and my people are in the wrong." Ex 9:27

### Commitment to Good

So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of faith. Gal 6:10

This should be the simplest response from the Christian community: to share the goodness of God with fellow humans. It will be unavoidable to desire to do good especially to Christians, once we have recognized the evil in our hearts and have repented.

### Obedience to God

God's desire for obedience from humans is grounded on His holiness and His love. By obeying Him we become holy like Him and love as He loves. We must love immigrants as an act of worship to our holy God.

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. Eph 5:1-2

The stranger who sojourns with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God. Lv 19:34

We must understand and submit to God's priorities. Nothing pleases Him more than obedience to His voice.

And Samuel said, "Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." 1 Sm 15:22

Do justice as an act of obedience to God's directives to His people. As God receives the foreigners (the immigrants) in his household and delights in their love for Him, in their obedience to Him, and their ministry to Him, the church should allow immigrants to minister in their midst, to be a servant of the Lord in the house of the Lord, a house of prayer to all nations. Undocumented immigrants' situations vary greatly and church leaders should use wisdom and godly counsel to decide whether or not and in which positions of service (and possibly leadership) the undocumented immigrants could serve in church life and structures.

Thus says the LORD: "**Keep justice, and do righteousness**, for soon my salvation will come, and my deliverance be revealed. Blessed is the man who does this, and the son of man who holds it fast, who keeps the Sabbath, not profaning it, and keeps his hand from doing any evil." Let not the foreigner who has joined himself to the LORD say, "The LORD will surely separate me from his people"; and let not the eunuch say, "Behold, I am a dry tree." For thus says the LORD: "To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant, I will give in my house and within my walls a monument and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name



which shall not be cut off. **And the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord, to minister to him, to love the name of the LORD, and to be his servants, every one who keeps the Sabbath, and does not profane it, and holds fast my covenant - these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.** Thus says the Lord GOD, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, I will gather yet others to him besides those already gathered.” Isa 56:1-8 (emphasis mine)

If you cannot produce the love you know you need to have for the immigrants, because of the Holy Spirit’s conviction, ask God to pour His love for all men into your heart.

God is the one who increases our love for all men and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all men, as we do to you. 1 Thes. 3:12

### Hearing God’s Word

Humans do and have experienced the voice of the Lord in different ways through time. He has spoken at Creation; His voice was likened to a thunder,<sup>10</sup> an audible voice,<sup>11</sup> and a still small voice.<sup>12</sup> God has indicated other ways he would speak to His people: young people shall prophesy,<sup>13</sup> and He will speak to His people by the lips of immigrants:

In the law it is written, “By men of strange tongues and by the lips of foreigners will I speak to this people, and even then they will not listen to me, says the Lord.” 1 Cor 14:21

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<sup>10</sup> Ex 19:19

<sup>11</sup> 1 Sm 3:1-10

<sup>12</sup> 1 Kgs 19:12

<sup>13</sup> Jl 2:28

Hearing God's Word is not limited to listening to the Sunday sermon or to Christian Radio. God speaks to His people, but is the church listening? "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" Rv 2:29. The church in the USA needs to hear a fresh Word of the Lord. If the Lord desires to use immigrants, documented and undocumented alike, who can stop Him?<sup>14</sup>

After denying the Lord three times as Jesus had forewarned him, Peter had an embarrassing encounter with the Lord he had betrayed. Now risen, the Lord did not go to Peter to look for an explanation of his shameful acts of betrayal. He knows the hearts of humans and He knows that often we fail Him, we sin by not obeying His commands. But Jesus Christ was interested in restoration. Three times He asked Peter one question, with one theme: love.

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Feed my lambs." A second time he said to him, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Tend my sheep." He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" And he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep." John 21:15-17

The text above is rich in meaning to any Christian, but for the purpose of this work suffice it to make one connection: to Peter's answers that he loved Jesus, the Lord always connected that love for Him with service to His people. May we love the Lord with all our hearts and serve Him as we serve His people, of every tribe, nation, and tongue.

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<sup>14</sup> Acts 5:38-39

Presence and involvement in the city, practice of the faith in seeking the peace (*shalom*) of the city, prayer for the city are all interwoven and they all must co-exist simultaneously and complementary, if the church is to be effective. No gap must be left open. Our task is great and the challenges are humanly impossible to overcome, but God is great, and His purposes will all come to pass in His time, through His power, for the honor and glory of His name.

### **Word Became Flesh**

Following Jesus' example, Christian churches that are full of grace and love will want to express their compassion and act on their love for the immigrant community within the scope of influence of the neighborhood God has entrusted them. The process outlined below assumes that a church that desires to share and live out the gospel with undocumented immigrants considers them as highly valuable as they do documented immigrants and citizens alike. Due to the peculiar challenges undocumented immigrants face and pose to church policies and practice, I will highlight a few situations that might need special attention. I will use the Brazilian immigrant community as a point of reference in order to contextualize my comments.

How does a church become attractive to any and many cultures and languages different from its own? This was the question posed to a group of leaders of a church plant in the city of Lynn, Massachusetts. The goal is high: this church desires to attract and serve representatives of every culture and language present in the city and become a

church body that reflects the richness of the multi-faceted wisdom with which God has endowed His body with.

## The Hexagoning Exercise

In order to explore what it would take to involve other cultures into a homogenous church, a brainstorm meeting was called. Participants were engaged in a brainstorming activity that uses pieces of paper shaped as hexagons onto which a moderator writes the participants' answers to a posed question. After about forty answers are raised, the hexagons are grouped in clusters of similar concepts and these clusters receive a categorizing label which is be used to study the flow of activities (action – intended consequences – unintended consequences) in complex systems and in forming a causal loop diagram. This tool was chosen because it engages the participants in thinking through complex systems, which in turn produces group ownership of the conclusions, and because by gathering the group's perspectives into a common document, the final result reveals more variables than any one person could generate on their own.

Members of the church, multicultural guests and leaders were present and collaborated with their inputs, which were registered, and numbered (see Table 1). Following the meeting, the senior pastors met and classified all items under six categories: "A" through "F" (see Table 2 for the description of each category and to see what answers are included into each of them). In doing this part of the exercise, the senior pastors added a seventh category "G" into the list: *Value cultural differences and mine their strength*. With these categories in place, the exercise continued, and has been reevaluated from time to time within the 3 years since the first meeting happened. The causal loop diagram reflects the answers given on the first meeting, plus years of living and thinking through these issues as the church lives out its calling to engage all cultures around it.



**TABLE 1 - Responses to the Hexagoning Exercise Question: “How do we become attractive to as many cultures (subcultures included) and languages as there are represented in Lynn?”**

1. Not single them out.
2. Stay focused / centered in the story of Jesus in our worship instead of our personal cultural stories.
3. Intentionally educating ourselves about other cultures.
4. Having planned weekly activities to get people to interact together.
5. Be able to adapt to other worship styles.
6. Going out and being involved in different cultures in the community (not caring about just one kind of culture at a time).
7. Become useful, accessible and helpful to the local population especially youth.
8. Posting vision in different languages and give out to people (put our pictures on it and a blank space that means that they are missing here).
9. Look at American, New England, historical divisions and deal with that from a cultural perspective – reconcile the past before moving on with the future (at the foundational level).
10. People that speak their language.
11. Learn about different culture dimensions in general (use of time, relationships, family structures, etc.).
12. Intentionally building genuine relationships.
13. Having follow-up teams.
14. In reference to youth, not be afraid to go into their culture.
15. Having things that will attract their own culture (food, crafts, dances, etc).
16. Educate the congregation to develop world views (get informed globally).
17. Finding out the leaders of the community and getting involved politically, .and in social events and stand up against social injustices.
18. Freedom of expression in worship, not only with the music, but with the holistic experience (teachings on different types of prayer, fasting, tithing as an expression of worship, community meals as an expression of worship).
19. Have one international day a year (bringing their flag, food, own songs, anthems, folk songs).
20. The decoration of the church can reflect the different cultures.
21. Getting people involved in the service shortly after they come to public service, so they feel we need them.
22. Being family minded and oriented (family atmosphere – older people, family relations, spiritual family). Genuinely care for each other as you would your family.
23. Need to have pictures in the church walls.
24. Make the gospel relevant to other cultures (adapt as water) “be water my friend.”
25. Continue to have patience because different cultures have different expectations, and both sides might not even know what the expectations are (send thank-you cards, etc.).
26. Cultural exchange (question and answer sessions – about expectations, different boundaries, greetings, have them teach us about their worship and lead us in those styles).
27. Have the ability to accept everything (baggage) in everyone and count the cost to deal with that (or figure out that we can’t and count with the help of others).
28. Value people as people (be interested in the person and not “filling a quota” in our church).
29. Holiday and special occasion in their cultures (black history month).

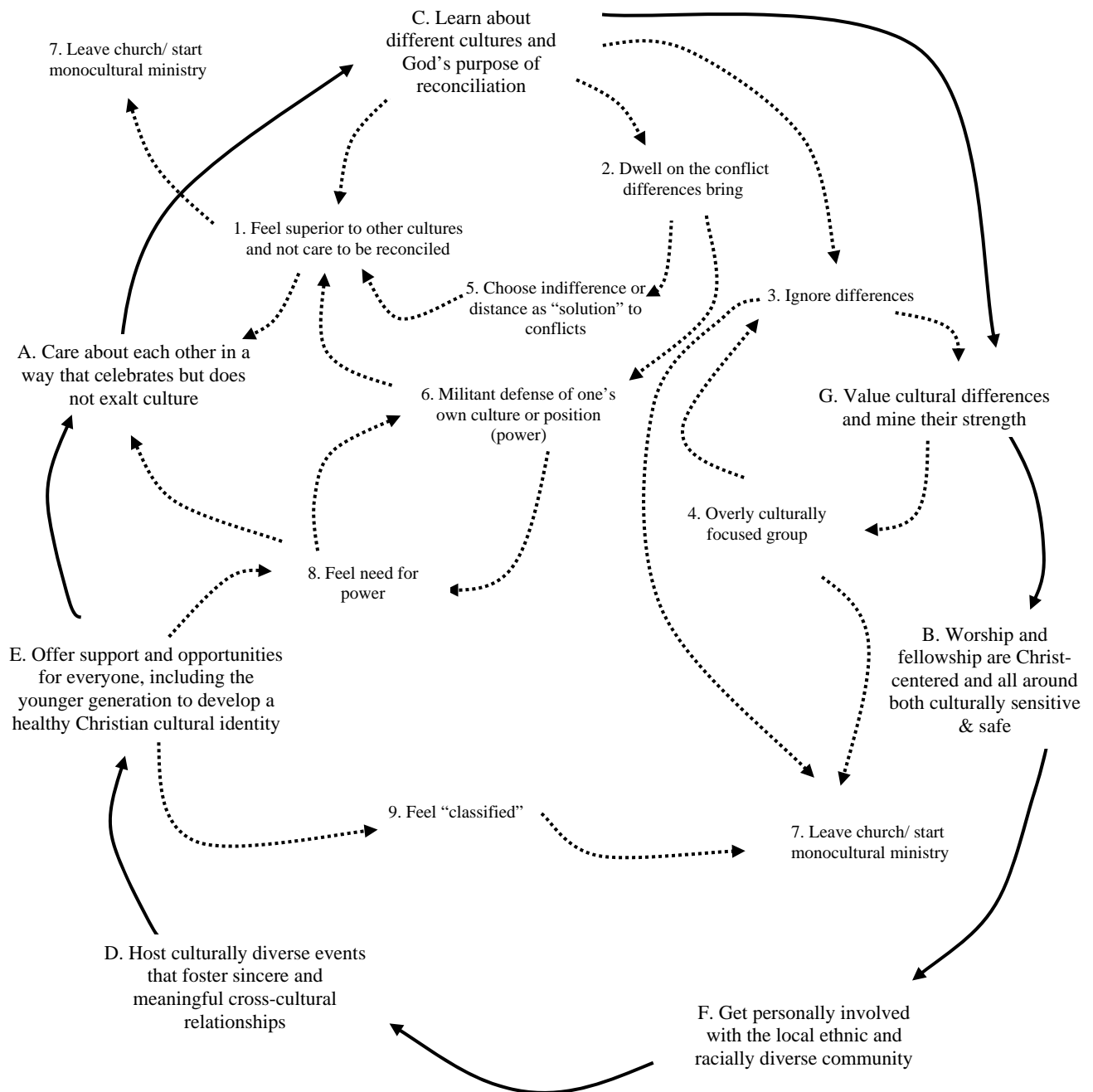
30. Prepare a fair showing movies in different languages, from different countries and allowing them to express themselves through singing and dancing, flags, books, food (United Nations) to show that the church is interested in their people and countries.
31. Do church in a multicultural way.
32. Think about the children.
33. Figure out how to bridge the gap between the first and second generations (from different countries), helping them accept their culture and not reject it.
34. Bridge the age group gap in worship styles.
35. Strategically use the youth to get to the parents (younger people are more open to diversity).
36. Specific messages for the youth, having the youth involved in the service (playing instruments).
37. Make room for those people to be part of the leadership of the church (even church council) not putting them away only in some areas, but let them be part of leading the church.
38. Having an interpreter.
39. Have space in the layout of the church so that people can meet each other and talk (conversational spaces).
40. Ask people from other cultures that might not be as loud as the Latin cultures about how they communicate and what is appropriate behavior (identifying what those cultures are).

**TABLE 2 – Classifying the Hexagoning Answers**

<b>A - Care about others in a way that celebrates but not exalt culture</b> Answers # 1, 9, 13, 21, 22, 24, 25, 27, 28, 37.
<b>B - Worship and fellowship are all around both sensitive and safe</b> Answers # 2, 5, 8, 15, 18, 20, 23, 31, 39.
<b>C - Learn about different cultures and God’s purpose of reconciliation</b> Answers # 3, 9, 11, 16, 26, 40.
<b>D - Hold culturally diverse events that foster sincere and meaningful cross-cultural relationships</b> Answers # 4, 10, 19, 29, 30, 38.
<b>E - Offer support and opportunities for younger generation to develop a healthy Christian cultural identity</b> Answers # 7, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36.
<b>F - Get personally involved with the local ethnic and racially diverse community</b> Answers # 6, 12, 14, 17.
<b>G - Value cultural differences and mine their strength</b>



**CAUSAL LOOP DIAGRAM with answers to the question: “How do we become attractive to as many cultures (subcultures included) and languages as there are represented in Lynn?”**



## The Positive Loop

The process of becoming a church open to all cultures begins and ends with Christians that, whether or not in leadership, **care about others in a way that celebrates but does not exalt culture (A)**. This can be done with or without previous education and research about diversity, but simply by being sympathetic to other people groups a person can offer respect and be interested in others. Similarly to what happens in interpersonal relationships with personality affinity, a corporate affinity may be, and quite often is, formed with an overarching interest for groups with origins and backgrounds different from its own. Moved by their care for others, these Christians involve others who initially “do not care” or do not perceive the “need to mix” and together devote some time to informal or formal learning processes to **learn about different cultures and God’s purpose of reconciliation (C)**.

God’s purpose in the working out of reconciliation becomes of major importance in the discussion, differentiating a pure sociological or anthropological conversation from one that affirms a life-changing application of the Word of God into the lives of all involved—immigrants and otherwise. By talking about culture in their own countries or social circles people make themselves vulnerable and a safe place is created for differences to be expressed and appreciated, and for conflicts to be resolved. From a better understanding of the peoples and cultures present, the group **values cultural differences and mine their strength (G)**. Not only the beauty of the common ground is brought up in interactions, but the differences are acknowledged, appreciated and the strengths found in each culture are used to enrich the group’s expression of God in the

city. Because the group values other cultures there is tolerance and appreciation for things done a little (or very) differently, even when it feels uncomfortable. The message of the Gospel, however, will not be compromised because of culture. Thus, **worship and fellowship are Christ-centered and all around both culturally sensitive and safe (B)**. A Christ-centered community will follow Him and obey His commandments, particularly that of going forth and making disciples.

The group is encouraged to **get involved with the local ethnic and racially diverse community (F)** in small groups, in volunteering, in being a good neighbor, in prayer-walking, being at various citizens meetings, walking inside ethnic food markets and purchasing their merchandise, asking how to prepare a dish and engaging in conversation. To reach out to those other cultures found in the city that still have no representation in the local church, the church will put together and **host culturally diverse events that foster sincere and meaningful cross-cultural relationships (D)** with those non-involved cultures and anybody else that is attracted to the family of God in the city.

The focus remains on the people as human beings and not as representatives of a certain culture. When the events held address the needs of the diverse groups, be it entertainment, education, food, or any other, the church will see adults, children and youth coming to check the church out. The church, then, understanding the challenges of living in a diverse environment, **offers support and opportunities for the younger generation to develop a healthy and biblical Christian cultural identity (E)**. In serving the children and youth, the adults (parents) see a need met and are more open to

the gospel. In turn, they find a group of people that genuinely **cares about who they are and celebrate their culture as well as their own (A)**.

### Unintended Consequences

The potential for negative unintended consequences is present in this system and it starts with a tendency to **ignore the differences (3)** as they certainly will become apparent in the process. By choosing not to deal with conflicting feelings, ideas and practices, and noticing that this is one of the major drives of this congregation, people may choose to deal with this situation by **leaving the church (7)**. Another alternative for dealing with this would be to remain in the church but **feel superior to other cultures**, which with time leads to **not caring to be reconciled (1)** since reconciliation involves recognizing the value in others. In this case, the church body notices the difference in the interpersonal relationships, yet continues to pursue reconciliation. If the people are really not interested in reconciliation they will eventually **leave the church (7)**. They might find a homogeneous church that does not pursue reconciliation as strongly (or not at all) as “a refuge from the storm” or they might not join another church at all.

Another potential for negative input is the choice to **dwelling on the conflict differences bring (2)**. Since this church will become a learning community with opportunity to work through cultural and racial issues, those who choose not to participate in the forums and educational meetings might feel tempted to focus only on the hard part of reconciliation, the tension that it brings, and in an attempt to cope they might also **choose indifference or distance as “solution” to conflicts (5)**. Indifference

being the opposite of love and distance the opposite of friendship will open the door for the sin of pride which often leads people to **feel superior to other cultures (1)**. The continuation of this unwillingness to work out the differences causes people **not to care to be reconciled** and eventually leave the church, hopefully going to another instead of backsliding. **Dwelling on the conflict that differences bring (2)** also has the potential to develop a **militant defense of one's own culture based on position (power) (6)**, which is caused by fear that one's own culture and traditions might be overtaken, supplanted and eventually forgotten. This could happen inside the host culture community (Americans) or even within the culture that has been reached by the host church. Once someone becomes militant in defending his own position of power in church, the tendency is to **feel the need to exercise power (8)**.

Immigrant communities by virtue of being a minority, have a felt need for opportunities to grow in social and leadership status. If the host church makes the immigrants feel that they are but “a group that needs our help,” they will feel devalued and desire to have their own expression of social structures. On the other side, the members of the host church who have been there for a longer period than the immigrants might feel that the newcomers are “dethroning” them, taking every leadership opening, playing every instrument in the band, etc. and in turn, they might feel the need to regain power. If this feeling is overridden by a **care about each other (A)**, in the power of the Holy Spirit, the negative cycle may be stopped and reversed. If not, either or both of the groups that have a power struggle might end up **feeling superior to other cultures and not care to be reconciled (1)**, which with time will produce a church split, causing either

an individual, a family or a group to **leave the church (7)** and start another mono-cultural church.

Another balancing loop can potentially appear after the core **value of cultural differences (G)** is established. The group may become so intense in exploring the differences that they become an **overly culturally focused group (4)**. They exalt culture-hood instead of the gospel and refuse to work out the differences and learn to work together. Tolerance becomes the norm and “I’m ok, you’re ok” philosophy takes the place of the prophetic “iron sharpens iron.” Maintaining the peace takes the place of seeking the peace among conflict. In order to avoid conflict, this group chooses to **ignore the differences (3)** even though they are well aware of what those differences are, or else, they decide to **leave the church (7)**.

From the **offer of support and opportunities for younger generation to develop a healthy Christian cultural identity (E)** the children and especially the youth may develop a **feeling of being “classified”** according to their ethnicity or race which is undesirable and a “turn-off” for them. This can make these young people **leave the church (7)**. Also from **(E)** some might feel the **need for power (8)** and follow the path that leads to **leaving the church (7)** / starting or joining a mono-cultural ministry.

### Counter-productivity

One point worthy of attention for its probability of counter-productivity is the development of an overly culturally focused group environment, for as the same time that it grows into a safe place of acceptance of people’s backgrounds it also develops a situation which can potentially exclude newcomers of feeling welcomed if either they do

not care about the issue of reconciliation or if they are not in touch and comfortable with their own cultural identity. Whenever a visitor comes in he/she will see and perceive the strong focus on reconciliation of race, culture, language, etc. This will become either a positive or a negative input, depending on the visitor's interest. For example, if a Brazilian visitor comes in while there's no other Brazilian representative he/she could come to the conclusion that since there is no validation of the Brazilian culture, it must, therefore, be unimportant to the group. He/she could conclude that since no room was made for his/her particular culture the space for it will never be there, and as a result, he/she may leave and not come back, which would be the opposite effect from the desired result. It would, in this scenario, possibly be easier, or "more normal" for the visitor to deal with a congregation that has no cultural focus at all and try to fit into the Euro-American church culture than to see so many other cultures represented but not his/hers.

On the other hand, the same visitor might be able to catch the concept of inclusion and reconciliation and realize that his/her presence and contribution to the process would enrich the congregation. By his/her being there the Church Body would be enriched and then stretched to include yet another culture's aspect to worship.

In the same vein, it takes a special African-American individual or couple to be the initial representation in the church while no others are there. From our conversations in the issue of reconciliation we found that while immigrants from some countries may visually blend in among white Americans and immigrants from Africa are comfortable in their diversity, a true tension exists among white and black Americans which leads the blacks to visually check their surroundings for people of color, even sub or unconsciously, in order to feel comfortable in the room. While the church is at the

beginning stages of inclusion it is necessary that the leaders pray for and expect to see people of all colors, classes, and cultures who will be willing to be pioneers, to open the way for others.

Another possible counter-productive point is that of offering support and opportunities for the younger generation to develop a healthy Christian cultural identity. Through that we would try to penetrate into the fabric of the upcoming city citizens and develop an ever-growing Christian presence in both the influential and not-so-influential groups of city dwellers. The first counter-productivity gene in there is that most of these young people, coming from a first generation immigrant family background, by the reason of trying to fit in and achieve the acceptance of their USA-born friends, very frequently try to deny their cultural identity or at least downplay it. The tension present in the family might be mirrored in the church if we do not allow them to be who they are. By this I mean that they might not want to be “classified” as Koreans, Brazilians, Indians, etc., but just as people in general. In this way even a pure celebratory approach to one’s culture might become undesirable and a reason for them to not want to be involved if ever perceived as a means for classification of their identities. Cultural studies and affirmation might work better with first generation immigrants and national American cultural differences (ex.: African-American heritage; geographically defined cultures: South versus New England, West versus Mid-West, etc.; generational differences) than with second generation immigrants or even with the “generation one-and-a-half” (children born abroad but raised in the USA mostly with American language and cultural skills, yet able to function in their homeland language and cultural norms).



Second generation or generation one-and-a-half immigrants have developed what Eldin Villafañe names a “triple consciousness”<sup>15</sup> and Aida Besançon-Spencer calls an “intercultural background,”<sup>16</sup> a peculiar identity norm which causes them to feel totally comfortable only among themselves. Because of their backgrounds and experiences growing up “in between” cultures, as bridges many times, they do not fit in completely among the first generation of immigrants, nor do they totally fit in among the majority culture. To the immigrants, they act too much like Americans. To Americans, they still behave and think like immigrants. These people need a space of acceptance in church if they are to remain connected to the Body of Christ. By the time they reach adolescence, many want to stop going to their parents’ church and look for an alternative to the mono-cultural white American church. Will they find it?

A third counter-productive attitude would be choosing to ignore differences. It may become tempting to maximize the commonalities around the cultures, i.e. what makes us alike, and that is a positive thing, provided that the general attitude does not become a denial of the existence of real conflict in the congregation. Because of the nature of this ministry of reconciliation this church will most certainly encounter situations of conflicting cultures, interests, and even of traditions (biblical or non-biblical). The challenge here is three-fold, going beyond simply not ignoring that the problem exists. First, the always present pride (sin) in human nature must be conquered in the power of the Holy Spirit if any conversations are to take place in, which will lead to reconciliation. Secondly, there must be a well-defined boundary line to what is flexible and to what is non-negotiable in our faith and practice. This requires a continuous search

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<sup>15</sup> Eldin Villafañe, *The Liberating Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1993), 23.

<sup>16</sup> Spencer and Spencer, *The Global God*, 94.

of Scripture and of the human soul that will absolutely need to be submitted to the Word of God, which is a double-edged sword that divides soul and spirit.<sup>17</sup> Thirdly, there must be a deep comprehension, on the part of all involved, of the meaning of being in peace with the brethren.

Some tend to think that keeping the peace is “being quiet,” accepting anything. Maturity is in order, but the whole environment of the church, from the pulpit to coffee time conversations, must be clearly stating that hiding issues “under the rug” is not an acceptable course of action if we are really seeking reconciliation. Fear is a major contributor to keeping issues undealt with. People may fear punishment or that their image will be damaged by admission of failure of conflicting opinions among themselves. Pastors and leaders must be prepared and trained to initiate the pulling down of that wall before it is too high. Proactively, messages from the pulpit must bring out examples of personal failures and restoration as a positive and acceptable outcome. In small groups, leaders must be able to communicate this message. And in all instances when the actions speak louder than words telling that something is at the root of the conflict, church leaders must be skilled in the art of conflict resolution and assistance in the restoration of relationships.

The search for reconciliation through Christ becomes a well-ingrained way of life for those who value becoming more like Christ above seeking to live a life that is comfortable and conflict-less. However naïve that concept may seem many people operate within this sinful system that tries to remove conflict from their own lives by oppressing others and shifting the burden of feeling the conflict to the oppressed. The change from these sinful tendencies to a life that is focused on worshiping the God of

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<sup>17</sup> Heb 4:12

Heaven and reflecting His character in our own lives (i.e. being just although living among unjust people and systems) can only occur by the operation of God's power in our own lives and in the lives of our cities. Through the study and application of God's Word we are transformed and confronted by our own sin against His holiness. This is one of the reasons why the Bible becomes so central to the life of the church for without the Word of God our discussions will turn empty and bitter and our conflicts impossible to resolve.

Whenever we revisit our dogmas caused by conflict within the body of Christ we are bound to be stretched and challenged. A church that is open to minister to all immigrants (undocumented and documented) must seek to develop a Biblical belief system that is honoring to the Lord and at the same time is not disrespectful to believers of other cultures that might become part of the local church. Our cultural background and our own personal experiences may have put a mark, maybe tainted, our theology and to truly achieve theological reconciliation we must be able to purify our theology from our cultural perceptions. This is nearly impossible for someone to do while living among his own and not being exposed to other cultural theologies. With this in mind the local church encourages its members to participate in Missions trips abroad and promotes some of those from among its own members and groups. By being exposed to another country's perception of God the church is enriched and upon returning to the USA it becomes easier to see the sometimes stark contrast of some of the national common Christian beliefs and the Bible or even the contrast of our practices with that of Christians from here and somewhere else. To a certain degree this confrontation can happen with the presence of those foreigners living among us but for the impact to reach the fullest

extent it would be best to have as many members as possible go abroad and immerse themselves in Christ's Church away from here.

Back to the local church, the simple fact that different perspectives in life, coming out of our ethnical/racial/etc. cultures is bound to take people to a situation when they will be challenged in their belief and it is at that point that the Bible will have to remain the utmost authority coupled with the grace of God in giving the revelation of its interpretation and application. A continual intentional re-visitation of Theology and exegesis is necessary for the life of this multicultural church.

Another cycle of counter-productivity would start from the point that even after learning about the differences in cultures, people may decide to ignore the differences, trying to focus only on the common ground and putting the differences under the rug. This certainly brings conflict that brews in the unseen layers of our church existence until it cannot be hidden or avoided. While some may choose to leave the church at that point instead of dealing with the conflict, others may dwell on the conflict that those differences bring and be not willing to move on to reconciliation. Again, pastors and leaders need a lot of wisdom and grace to steer people into the right direction, towards the heart of the Father. While conflicts are normal and expected to happen in this possibly volatile environment, feeding off of these conflicts is not the correct attitude, yet we see people (most likely dysfunctional) that seem to get their energy out of these exact situations, becoming "feeders of the fire," and certainly not the fire of God at that. The situation could lead to intense confrontations and become hurtful, if not worked out properly.

When people choose indifference or distance as “solution” to conflicts they are in fact demonstrating that they do not want – or cannot at that particular point in time handle it – to love others as Jesus loved them. The message of love is intense and tough in that it does not always include “feeling good.” Feeling bad but doing the right thing is also love. Those in leadership will hopefully have worked out in themselves the issue of extending love to the unlovable and/or to people who give and receive love differently. To counteract this issue we will need strong leaders that are able to confront others in love and to walk with them in developing the character of Christ in them.

Feel superior to other cultures and not care to be reconciled is the epitome of how this church does not want to be. Yet, within the church body there are potentially those who harbor those feelings but remain in the church because of the strong community bonds that were developed in their reaching-out-in-love efforts. Once again this church needs to deal with this situation in the power of God to break the power of sin in the lives of these dear ones and to foster the environment of Heaven here on Earth.

One of the biggest factors against change in a local church is people’s attachments to past experiences. I have noticed that when Christians get together from different traditions, or even simply from different local churches under the same tradition, they bring on with them valuable experiences that many times turn into an expectation that “if things here are well done, they will reproduce that good experience I had before.” Conflict certainly happens when opposite expectations are brought into the discussion. To overcome that, the leadership of the church must be well defined in what to teach and how to live out those values. There must be an understanding of what this particular

church will be about so that those who do not want to be part of it may leave without causing damage by sowing seeds of dissension and strife.

### **Biblical Reflection**

The story of Jesus and the Samaritan Woman, as recorded in John 4, is a parallel example of the process seen in the causal loop diagram.

The story starts in verse 3, when Jesus leaves Judea to return to Galilee (his disciples with him – implied). Verse 4 states that “He had to go through Samaria on the way.” His need was not geographical nor topographical, but missiological, since there were other more desirable and safer ways preferred by the Jews to cross from Judea to Galilee.<sup>18</sup> In order to fulfill the mission the Father had given him, Jesus cared for others and lived to “seek and save what was lost” (Lk 19:10). He knew Samaria’s history, challenges and conflicts with the Jews. He crossed cultural boundaries and started a conversation with not only a Samaritan, but a woman in the village of Sychar. Knowing what he was “getting into” he was not surprised by her own surprise and question “You are a Jew, and I am a Samaritan woman. Why are you asking me for a drink?” (v.9) After Jesus introduced the subject of the living water (vv.10, 13) (God’s purpose for reconciliation is salvation) he continues conversing with the woman and brings a Word of Knowledge about her, which makes her conclude that he must be prophet (vv.16-18). She then goes on to ask him yet another cultural-driven question in search of reconciliation, “...why is it that you Jews insist that Jerusalem is the only place of worship, while we

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<sup>18</sup> Elizabeth Conde-Frazier, S. Steve Kang and Gary A. Parrett, *A Many Colored Kingdom: Multicultural Dynamics for Spiritual Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 70.

Samaritans claim it is here at Mount Gerizim, where our ancestors worshiped?” (v. 19) Jesus replies with a deeper Theology than that which had been preached and practiced until then. His deeper knowledge and revelation of true biblical interpretation brought about the strength of the Jewish culture: “salvation comes from the Jews” (v. 22) and embraced all cultures’ worship to God, including the Samaritans: “... true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. The Father is looking for anyone who worships him that way.” (v. 24) The place now becomes safe for the woman to inquire about the object of worship: “I know the Messiah will come – the one who is called Christ. When he comes, he will explain everything to us” (v. 25). This time of fellowship immediately becomes Christ-centered: “I am, the one speaking to you” (v. 26).

Now the recently-converted woman becomes the bearer of good news and gets involved with the local community, telling others about Jesus: “... the woman ... went back to the village and told everyone ... so the people came streaming from the village to see him” (v. 29,30). A “special open-air crusade” took place right away at the well, in the heat of the day fostering a personal relationship between Jesus and the people from the village and they begged Jesus to stay longer (v. 40). The opportunity for this new group of people to believe in Jesus was given them simply by the fact that he stayed there “long enough for many of them to hear his message and believe” (v. 41). These people’s final exclamation recorded in the chapter was “Now we believe because we have heard him ourselves, not just because of what you told us. He is indeed the Savior of the world” (v. 42) demonstrating an understanding that allowed other nations and cultures to be included in the work of salvation.

Jesus' lesson to his disciples in this context was "my nourishment comes from doing the will of God, who sent me, and from finishing his work" (v. 34). First, obedience to God is necessary. Secondly, the harvest includes all peoples "... look around you! Vast fields are ripening all around us and are ready now for the harvest ... and the fruit they harvest is people brought to eternal life" (v. 35). Lastly, Jesus gives a directive about whom we are supposed to reach with the gospel, who is supposed to congregate with us: "I sent you to harvest where you didn't plant: others had already done the work, and you will gather the harvest" (v. 38). People from other cultures, countries and races are ready to receive the gospel, they are ready for harvest, and we should be meeting with them to worship Christ Jesus, the One who saves us all.

### **Conclusion**

The role of the church, or the ministry of the church to undocumented immigrants in the USA as described in this chapter, is to seek the peace of the city in its various and profound ways. Never forgetting the verbal annunciation of the Good News of salvation, the church is also to extend fellowship and mercy ministries to immigrants (documented and undocumented). Although there is a place for a short-term impact and contribution when ministering to any group of people, the commitment to reach out to any specific group, if taken seriously with view of making a lasting systemic contribution and if based on biblical ordinances, should be for the long term. Social development, social justice, and worship in its many expressions, manifest the presence of God in the city (incarnation in a complex system), and by including immigrants in the ranks of church



members and leaders, the church opens up for God to manifest His manifold wisdom through the Church Body. The spiritual ministry of the church to undocumented immigrants is the same as to anybody else.

For the church to be effective in the ministry to undocumented immigrants there must be the exercise of complex systemic thinking about any problem, issue or challenge, with the participation of all involved. The example of the hexagoning exercise and subsequent causal loop diagram development and explanation served to model one recommended methodology for the inclusion of immigrants in non-recent-immigrants' churches.

It is necessary for the church to understand the limitations of the influence over people's decisions as well. Although pastors and leaders might desire and even try to convince people of sin (any sin) ultimately the decision is theirs. The church then, needs to decide on how to minister to undocumented immigrants.

It is granted that Peter clearly exhorts Christians to obey authorities:

Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to praise those who do right. For it is God's will that by doing right you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish men. Live as free men, yet without using your freedom as a pretext for evil; but live as servants of God. 1 Pt 2:13-16

But my prompting to the church is that the Word brings many other clear exhortations that Christians seem to ignore or not be so careful about pointing out. In other words, culture is playing a big part on the church of the USA nowadays, to highlight the verses above in the midst of a nationwide ill feeling on the issue of immigration, while at the same time, culture dictates that some other things are OK to slip by and "they are not a big deal." This is not to say that because other sins are rampant

in the church, occasional sinful actions of undocumented immigrants are justified. Two wrongs do not make one right. However, in the same way that the church applies mercy and compassion towards other Christians and gives them plenty of time and opportunity to repent and change their ways, the same should be done with the undocumented immigrants. One must also recognize that not all undocumented immigrants are living in sin: they may be living in illegality (out of status immigration-wise) but not in sin. Others are living in sin. Illegality in and of itself is not a crime nor is it immoral. The definition of which undocumented immigrant is living in sin belongs to God and the person.

Many facets of the church's ministry to undocumented immigrants in the USA remain to be studied and understood. They are the object of my writing in the next chapter.

## **PART III**

### **CONFRONTATION**

## **Chapter 5**

### **Outcome and Further Research**

The complexity of the immigration issue, combined with the focused character of this thesis, leave a number of fields open for more study and development, specifically from a Christian point of view and its application to ministry praxis.

In the previous chapters I have sought to expound on the need of a reassessment by the church in the USA in its response to and interaction with the immigrant community, including those who are undocumented. Although the Bible does have one text where it clearly commands Christians to obey the earthly authorities, Scriptures also demonstrate that it is possible to disobey the earthly law and obey God (see the example of Peter in Acts 10), to disobey the law and not be condemned by God (see the example of David in 1 Sm 21) and even to disobey God's law in a situation where immigrants have to lie and still be blessed by God (consider Abraham, the immigrant, who lied to Abimelech as a way to protect himself in a hostile country system which could kill him to take hold of his wife, as registered in Gn 20; and also David "faking" mental illness to protect his life in enemy's territory, according to 1 Sm 21).

From Old Testament times the Word has condemned homosexuality and murder (ex. abortion) yet the church in the USA seems to be more compassionate today towards homosexuals and abortionists than towards undocumented immigrants. Imagine a church meeting in which people are received into membership. In some denominations, the homosexual will find opportunity to become a member of the church. In most churches

the abortionist will not be asked if she (and by extension he, since in many cases the father of the unborn child either promotes or supports the choice to kill the baby) has ever killed anyone – it is too personal a question. If it was the case that the woman would confess to this irreversible act, most churches would apply God’s mercy and forgiveness to her (and him) and then the opportunity would be open for fellowship in the church. However, some churches might not allow undocumented immigrants to join, become members, or receive assistance based solely on the fact that he/she does not have a valid visa, since once received into membership, the person might be entitled to be considered for leadership positions.

The undocumented immigrant people of today may be waiting on legalization processes that are ever so slowly progressing, moving along the enormously complicated systems within the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, some waiting for as long as 10 years or more! Others have done everything within their reach at the time when applications were still being received for aliens unlawfully present in the USA but have realized too late that their American attorneys made errors, or blatantly altered the documents filed with the application and now are left with no recourse. Many other of today’s undocumented immigrants are not in a legalization process simply because the laws are “closed,” in other words, there is not a lawful avenue for legalization.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, the documented immigrants of today may have been illegally in the USA for a period of time that varies from a day to many years. Some may have entered illegally via Mexico, via Canada or other ways. Yet, with time and legal opportunities many have

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<sup>1</sup> The “U. S. Citizenship and Immigration Services” (USCIS) has posted an “Immigration Fraud Warning” on their homepage, which reads “All customers should be advised that currently no temporary worker program exists for aliens unlawfully present in the United States.” USCIS, <http://www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis>, (accessed February 20 2007).

found employers who valued their work ethic and hard work, and sponsored them into legal status. Others have entered and always remained legally here. If the church does not accept today's undocumented immigrants, will it receive those who once were here illegally but now are legalized? If so, is it not treating people with partiality? How would it look to have in the application for membership or for ministry credentials the question: "Have you ever been in the USA illegally? If so, explain?" Would this application also bear the questions "Have you ever had an abortion? Have you ever lied? Have you ever dealt with greed?"

My argument that churches are to love and minister to every need of the undocumented immigrant is based on God's character and calling to His people: love, justice and mercy. This may also be the argument of "gay rights" movement defenders, but the difference is clear to me in the moral aspect. Homosexuality was never accepted and "justified" in the Bible – breaking earthly law has. Homosexuality was mentioned in the list of sins that makes the people who commit them not be admitted into Heaven. Illegality was not ever mentioned as a sin. And back to the scaling of intensity of sins that the church has invented: why can the church love and "help" and minister with compassion to homosexuals while hoping they will change their ways, but cannot or will not love or help or minister with compassion to people in illegal status even as they hope for legalization? It is my opinion that the church sees illegal immigration as a sin against their culture and country, and considers homosexuality an individual sin that affects no one but the sinner alone. This is a major mistake the church is making.

Not many Christians in the USA stand without an opinion on the issue of immigration, and strong emotional responses frequently appear in conversations and

discussions over this matter. As it refers to individual relationships, some Christians (and non-Christians as well) might be more open to accepting undocumented people into their own individual lives. However, when the question is worded in a way that calls attention to the masses of undocumented immigrants – along with the ever present misconceptions about what this means to society – a negative reaction is common. The Church must wrestle with how it perceives individuals in relation to the whole (collective category).

The theme of assimilation or merging activities with the ethnic churches remains to be studied and/or developed within Christian circles. In Boston there are two visible movements in the life cycle of churches: older congregations are dwindling and not being able to attract the younger generation; newer congregations are most often ethnic churches that are growing and thriving. There is a certain degree of cooperation between the two: Euro-American churches rent out space to the ethnic churches allowing them to grow while taking in much needed funds to support their old building structures' expenses. In some notable cases of this cooperation from older churches who recognize God's move in the ethnic churches and see the probable future of their own assembly which is about to close, the older congregation has made a donation of their building to an ethnic church. In some cases this has happened within the same denomination, in other cases, the older congregation has donated the building to a different denomination while requesting that they be allowed to use it at no charge for as long as they continue to meet. However, the historic life cycle of ethnic churches shows that within a few generations they also die down when first generation immigrants from that specific country or language stop coming.

Generation one-and-a-half and second generations are the links, the bridges into the future and they must be included somewhere in the life of these churches for the sake of the kingdom of God. More studies need to be developed on how to involve them in such a way that not as many are lost as is the case nowadays. There must be a purposeful movement from the ethnic church to serve these children and youth and simultaneously there must be a deep desire and involvement on the part of the Euro-American churches to receive them and allow them to be themselves, bridging the new generation to Christ's feet (salvation) and God's throne (worship). There must be an integration of ministry between the Euro-American churches and the ethnic churches, uniting to stand, or else one will lose out on the richness of the renewal that young people bring and the other will eventually disappear.

Another issue that deserves investigation is the history of global migration and its influence in today's challenges in view of security issues, culture preservation and sovereignty. The Bible does not mention illegal statuses – why? Was there such a thing as an undocumented immigrant in those days? Maybe my historian and archaeologist friends will become interested in this and bring light into the discussion. Through this thesis I certainly have not tried to defend the idea of open immigration for all but to raise awareness of the need for more just laws. If there is a chance of getting a visa, the potential immigrant will be more willing to wait for his turn and immigrate legally. He has everything to gain from waiting. But if the laws so narrow the entrance, that it makes it impossible even to apply for a visa, people are practically enticed to seek an illegal way of entry, and the very narrowing of opportunities creates the right conditions for the proliferation of illegality and human trafficking activities.



The Christian practitioner will hit a wall when seeking help to think immigration issues through in the field of Christian Ethics. In this thesis I have interacted with Ethicists by raising questions as to the extent of the application of the principles they defend. The gap is wide open in the Christian circles for a global perspective in Christian Ethics. It would greatly enrich the discussion to have Euro-American as well as non-Americans address the issue.

More writings are necessary to develop the theological understanding of the ethnic church. Ethnic pastors have to deal with all levels of illegality. Some members of their congregations have simply overstayed their visa and work in the service industry as self-employed paid by cash. This is the least of their “worries.” Then there are those who have entered the country illegally, have evaded the court system, and have engaged in all sorts of documentation forgery. There are people in the ethnic churches who have just come in search of “a better life” while others are here as Joseph was in Egypt – a slave sent ahead by God to support his family in a time of famine. Some have children here and feel as a total stranger in society, like Moses who named his child Gershom.<sup>2</sup> It is common to hear prayer requests in ethnic churches, where the mother of a teenage girl asks the pastor to pray for God to bless her daughter’s “crossing” of the frontier (through Mexico), that she would be protected from all dangers (hunger, cold, sexual assaults, robbery) and brought in safely. Meanwhile, others ask prayer for someone who is applying for a visa at the American Consulate in Brazil – with false documents – that God would bless it and have them approve it. Here is a true story: at one church retreat a very close friend of mine was rooming with guys he did not previously know. One of

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<sup>2</sup> Ex 2:22 “She bore a son, and he called his name Gershom; for he said, ‘I have been a sojourner in a foreign land.’”

those men was thanking God aloud because he felt he was such a great help – a blessing – to the immigrant community through his work, uniting families, ending their suffering of years. When my friend asked that man what was his work, the answer was “I’m a coyote”!<sup>3</sup> The interpretation of what it means to be a blessing has gone so far! While the pastor is preaching “you are blessed so go and be a blessing” the audience may be interpreting his words in a inusitate manner. The theological basis of preaching to immigrants must be visited and expounded upon.

From a Christian viewpoint more detailed descriptions of specific immigrant communities are needed. Some anthropologists have written about their target communities but very little, if anything is found by Christians, with the Christian reader in mind. I can say from my community, that all Brazilians are not the same! History will agree with me in that not all immigrants come (or go) with the best intentions. Generalizations are bound to produce errors in judgment. In my community I have seen the best and the worst put together in one roof: the local church. From experience, I know one of more people in these situations: he was fleeing the police after he committed a crime; he was running away from the father of the girl he impregnated under death threats; she came single and pregnant to start afresh after so many disappointments in Brazil; she came to go to a University and become a Medical Doctor; he came to study music and become a musical score producer for Hollywood; he came to the USA totally illiterate in Portuguese to try to make a living washing dishes; they came with the whole family after a bankruptcy in Brazil; she came because God called her to pioneer Brazilian churches in this area; he came as a coyote but decided to stay and was saved and became

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<sup>3</sup> “Coyote” is the term used to refer to the people who are paid to guide other people into the USA usually through the Mexican border.

a pastor; he came as a Brazilian diplomat; and the list goes on and on and on. The stories are as varied as there are people. When someone calls me and asks about the Brazilian community, I always need more information about what part of the population they are asking about. Much more writing on this must be done to help the ethnic pastors and the Euro-American pastors who are interested in serving with the ethnic community.

More thought is called also on the position of denominations on the issue of immigration. Many denominations will not license an undocumented pastor, and at times, they will close an existing church that is pastored by an undocumented leader. Sometimes the church is not closed but told to leave the denomination. The fact is that these churches continue to exist and preach the gospel, pray for the healing of the sick, minister deliverance and advance the kingdom of God. They simply stay without a denomination, if it comes to that, but these undocumented pastors must obey God and heed his calling upon their lives. And while these denominations are denying any “good standing” to undocumented leaders, if they can find a documented immigrant to lead the congregation, they gladly accept tithes and offerings from the undocumented members in their churches. Is this not double standard? If the denomination really does not want to “make their hands dirty” with undocumented immigrants, they might as well put a “warning” in the offering envelopes: “any money obtained by illegal work in this country is not accepted in this church!” I realize I am provoking reactions with these thoughts but the standard is clearly “movable” whenever financial interests get mixed into the equation and the church is not exempt from this.

At the same token, some Brazilian ministers in Brazil criticize the multiplication of Brazilian churches in New England and the USA on the basis that some of the pastors

are illegally in this country, yet the same ministers come to the Brazilian churches in the USA with their tickets paid for, and happily accept the “love offering” that the church gives him, which is illegal to receive under a tourist visa. They come ready with sermons recorded on CDs and books in Portuguese and peacefully sell them after the service for the same nominal amount<sup>4</sup> that a CD is sold in Brazil without feeling wrong about it. All of these things are financed with the “illegal” money of many undocumented church members, but while the minister is criticizing the very existence of that church, he is also benefiting financially from that group of faithful people who want to bless him for coming and bringing the Word the Lord to them! More thought is necessary on the theology of the ethnic church, indeed.

On the issue of illegality and spreading the gospel/bringing revival, again the controversial character is strongly present but Christians must analyze their praxis in light of Scriptures and using reciprocity as well (a very important concept in international negotiations). Apparently, the USA church feels very comfortable in breaking the laws of other countries, such as China among others, in the name of spreading the gospel through distribution of Bibles to the persecuted church. It becomes hard to believe that God might be looking at the USA, and the Boston area particularly, as a dried up mission field, where Christians are about to be persecuted and where revival is sorely needed. While some long time New England pastors have continued to cry out for revival in this area and in this nation, are they ready to receive the answer from the Lord if it comes in the form of many, many Holy Spirit filled immigrants? What if these immigrants came here

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<sup>4</sup> A music CD sells for about R\$15.00 in Brazil and US\$15.00 in the USA. With a conversion rate of roughly 2 Reais per US Dollar, that minister is actually selling that CD for twice as much as in Brazil.

through the wrong way and later were born again, and now have become God's chosen instrument for revival? Are New Englanders ready to say "Thank you, Lord?"

My position in this country is well defined by my relationship with God and it is illustrated by the image of a bridge. I work with both cultures, I am married to an American, I understand both views, and I continuously search for the discernment of right and wrong on the issue of immigration without or in spite of cultural biases. This one thing I have learned: the USA is changing rapidly and if the church desires to be effective in sharing the message of the gospel through all the changes that have happened and the changes still to come, the church must be open to include the new faces and cultures that are coming into its doorsteps.

I have been made aware of illegal activities in many levels. They are revealed to me at work, at the church, through conversations and observations. I have learned not to pre-judge anyone based on the single piece of information that they are here illegally. There must be a distinction from people in one extreme of the picture, where literally the only illegal activity they do is to breathe the air inside the USA, to the other extreme of the situations, where every piece of the puzzle of someone's life is fake, altered or stolen. More information is needed if I, as a minister, am called to speak truth and justice into someone's life, but God is the only just Judge.

Greenway and Monsma write "cities will probably remain the focal point of the ethnic mix in the foreseeable future. ... America as a whole must come to terms with the new reality of a widely heterogeneous, multicultural society."<sup>5</sup> As an expression of that truth, the greater Boston is a region of many cultures, colors, races, languages and social-economic status, yet most of its churches are either mono-cultural or unintentionally

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<sup>5</sup> Greenway and Monsma, *Cities Missions' New Frontier*, 85.

diverse. The intentional aspect of being church is important because it is the “glue” that keeps the diverse parts together when challenges come up, along with our focus on serving and worshiping the one true God.

In a metropolitan area such as Boston it would be expected to see people from different nationalities, etc. gather together for worship at any given Sunday, even if this is not an intended goal for the congregation, and this happens in some churches – especially new churches – for a little while. However, the pull towards becoming a homogeneous assembly is a strong one, not to be despised or ignored. If the multicultural nature/makeup of the group is not intentional and more than accepted, encouraged, sooner or later the path of least resistance will be taken, splitting, dividing or separating the congregation into homogeneous groups that identify within themselves, to “make things easier to deal with.” The problem I see with this is that, although it is easier to communicate and congeal with one’s own culture, homogeneous congregations do not reflect either the makeup of this city or the characteristics of the Kingdom of God. Besides that, agreeing with Ortiz, we “believe that we limit the greatness of our Lord when we know God only as a local God who speaks our language and understands our conditions alone.”<sup>6</sup>

So, although there is a place for the expression of the homogeneous church, specifically to serve the non-English speaking first generation of immigrants, the church must stay alert to the need of the one-and-a-half and second generations. God is working to open our hearts to immigrants, to love our neighbors, and our eyes to see the harvest,

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<sup>6</sup> Manuel Ortiz, *One New People: Models for Developing a Multiethnic Church*, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 13.

so we can minister to all, include all peoples, languages and cultures and in that way reflect heaven.

And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and with golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints; and they sang a new song, saying, “Worthy art thou to take the scroll and to open its seals, for thou wast slain and by thy blood didst ransom men for God **from every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and hast made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on earth.** Rv 5:8-10 (emphasis mine)

Amen! Lord, may your will be done on earth as it is in heaven!

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## VITA

Eliana Marques Runyon was born on June 20, 1969 in the city of São Paulo, Brazil. In 1988, at the age of 19, she entered into licensed pastoral ministry. Two years after completing a Bachelor Degree in Education, she immigrated to the USA at the age of 23, and lived in Somerville, Massachusetts for 6 months. Upon arrival of her parents, who came in 1993 with a permanent residency granted in Brazil, she moved to Weymouth and participated in a team effort to both pioneer a Portuguese-speaking church in Rockland and revitalize a suffering church in Somerville, as assistant pastor.

After a period of adaptation in the new country, she enrolled in the Master's degree program at Gordon-Conwell's Boston Campus, Center for Urban Ministerial Education. In 1998, she moved to Dallas, TX and studied at Christ for the Nations Institute, earning an Associate's Degree in Practical Theology, while simultaneously continuing her study towards her Master's Degree through distance education. Following her return to Massachusetts, in 1999 she became co-pastor of the Malden Portuguese Foursquare Church, a Brazilian church pastored by her parents Rev. Cairo and Rev. Iracy Marques, and in 2001 was hired as a Technical Assistant at the Consulate General of Brazil in Boston. On January, 2002 she became a citizen of the United States.

In September, 2002 Eliana was ordained with the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel, and in January of 2003 was appointed Superintendent of the Northeast Area of Massachusetts, within the New England Portuguese District of the Foursquare Gospel Church. She was released from her role as co-pastor in Malden to plant a new Foursquare church in the city of Lynn.

On May 24, 2003, John and Eliana were married. The following May, she graduated from her Master of Divinity at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Boston Campus. Also in 2004, she was appointed Director and established the Foursquare Theological Institute, a Foursquare Certified Portuguese language institute that trains and forms leaders from the harvest to the harvest.

Rev. Runyon currently lives in Lynn, MA with her husband John and their son Christopher Joel, born January 18, 2006. She continues to work at the Consulate General of Brazil in Boston, at the Theological Institute, and for the Northeast Division. Her choice to pursue a Doctor of Ministry within the Ministry in Complex Urban Settings Track at the Boston Campus came naturally, motivated by her long term involvement with urban ministry. She will complete her Doctor of Ministry studies in May of 2007. Together, the Runyons continue to serve as co-pastors of One Voice, a church plant in Lynn.